TARRY-KNIGHT

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# TARRY, KNIGHT!

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## A STUDY IN STAINED GLASS

BY

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The cobbles rang to iron hoof,
Sharper than silver chime
That from the dove-loud stable roof
Told forth the death of time.

The Knight was supple as a larch ;
And as the bell gave tongue,
He stooped to clear the oaken arch
Across the courtyard flung.

The wizened hostler shook off sleep
Born of the noon-day glare ;
And like a startled rat did leap
To tend on man and mare.

The Knight did bring a mountain gloom
Into that sun-drowsed spot ;
His eyes were agates 'neath his plume,
That smiled and rested not.

His searching eyes like gems did blaze,
But meek was his address ;
There was compassion in his gaze,
And a great tenderness.

He watched the stabling of his mare,
Set sword and gauntlets down ;
Then took the quiet thoroughfare
Of the chime-haunted town.

He passed flushed burghers broad of girth,
And softly habited ;
Prelates and dames who walked the earth
Assured of board and bed.

As from the grey Cathedral tower
The noon chimed drowsily ;
The waiting Close did seem to flower
With choristers set free.

Of mid-day cheer he caught the sight
And breath as he did pass ;
He saw spread napery, snow-white,
Silver and deep-cut glass.

His fasting eyes were no whit dim,
He stayed not in his walk ;
Though the wide windows wafted him
Savours and snatch of talk.

He pushed the studded western door,
And paced the echoing aisle ;
Then made the sign, and knelt before
The altar a great while.

The clock called thrice from stable-roof
Where the grey doves abode ;
The cobbles rang to iron hoof,
And the Knight took the road.

# CHAPTER I

## ROBIN COMES TO LUSHDALE

ROBIN came to Lushdale shortly after the beginning of the October term. The new Dean caused a mild diversion in the Fourth Form room during a tiresome Algebra lesson by entering with his small son in tow. The Fourth Form rose at the appearance of the black coat and gaiters. The Choir School looked for these ecclesiastical incursions. Sometimes they meant half holidays. In the rear hovered the Head, gaunt and gigantesque in comparison with the meagre Dean. He introduced the visitor to the form master, Mr. James Little. Jumbo Little took Robin into custody with his wonted sang-froid. A few pleasantries were exchanged, and the new Dean turned to go.

"God bless you, my boy," whispered a back bench humorist.

Then the Dean came out with his solecism, "Cheery-oh, Robin!"

Jumbo Little stroked his chin apprehensively.

"Cheery-oh, Robin" is a tempting catchphrase. Robin tried to smile, but it was clear he was aware of his father's lapse. It did not make his ordeal any the easier. This

entrance was his first impression of Lushdale that was not entirely happy. There was something approaching panic in his brown eyes as he saw his parent borne away by the Head. Jumbo Little, describing the incident afterwards to Miss Tomlinson, declared that Robin looked like a trapped faun. Miss Tomlinson replied, "How very picturesque!"

"Cheery-oh, Robin!" The phrase went the rounds at the first recess. Subsequently it enjoyed quite a vogue, ousting "Yes. We have no bananas" for the time being. Every one addressed his neighbour as "Robin," and exhorted him to cheerfulness. Robin tried not to think hardly of the Dean, especially when he encountered Walker Major for the first time. Walker Major descended from the heights of the Sixth Form with the slogan upon his lips. Robin did not like Walker Major. He disliked conical heads, and Walker's head resembled that of William IV. There was a dash of Herbert Spencer about him, too.

He looked at Robin as if he were examining a biological specimen.

"I say! I hope your governor isn't out to please the boys," he said. "We don't want any heart-to-heart parsons here, you know."

Robin longed to assure Walker Major that his father was not a heart-to-heart parson, but found himself tongue-tied.

"Cheery-oh, Robin!" Walker Major yodled.

"Now boys! Altogether! Heep, Heep, Heep, Huraeeeh! Oh, spare us, Strangeways. Can't you tell him to cut that sort of thing out. Why don't you answer me. We don't stand any swank here, you know."

Robin hugged his strapful of brand new books and grinned. He did not feel like anything so dashing as a faun. Walker Major had thick wrists of a bluish tint. Robin had seen the scientific twist he had given to an arm. The arm belonged to a rat of a child who squealed. Robin felt he would rather sign away the articles of his faith than be man-handled by Walker Major. What precisely those articles were he had never defined to himself. He believed in his father, and he believed certain things of Lushdale, if one can so speak of his eager delight in the old town. Walker Major seemed to bar the way to a region of delight. Looking past him Robin could see the stone pillars of that entrance which had been known as the gate of the King's Children from the days when choristers wore ruff and doublet. Beyond lay Lushdale, the city of his heart's desire. The School play-ground was the first thing he had encountered to spell disillusionment.

"Don't squint," said Walker Major. "Hasn't Daddy told you to look a man straight in the eyes. He sounds that sort of parson. He's the youngest Dean in England, isn't he?"

"I think so."

Robin was relieved to find something that he could say.

"You shouldn't think, Robin dear. You should know. What does St. Paul say?"

But here Jumbo Little appeared on the scene, and Walker rounded off the inquisition by snatching the immaculate trencher from the small dark head, and hurling it in the direction of the gate. Robin darted off after his property, and gained the happy open country beyond. Out in the street he felt his wonted optimism returning. He would get the Choir School into focus presently. He supposed that Walker Major would have something better to do than to carry on his persecution, and "Cheery-oh, Robin" would have to be cheerfully lived down. To-morrow was a long way off, and in the meantime there was Lushdale awaiting him for to see and for to admire. He gave a little sigh of pleasure as he turned into the Close, and came upon the Cathedral, the great stone ship lying there becalmed. It was as if the billowing hills had been staid, and with them the great ship, for the Cathedral rests in the dip between Lushmount and the uprising country to the north. The huge and beautiful thing rested there and waited, wrapped in the gathering mists of the autumn evening.

It was three years since Robin had caught his first view of Lushdale. From that moment he had never wavered from his resolve that somehow and some day he would come to

live at Lushdale. His mother had often wondered at this constancy in her little boy. When she read him a child's version of *Pilgrim's Progress,* Lushdale was for him the City of Celestial Light. Whenever he joined in a game of general post Lushdale was always for him his *pied-à-terre.* Once a little girl had forestalled him. She had chosen Lushdale because of the Lushdale buns. If you have ever eaten a Lushdale bun you will share with her a happy memory. Robin had wept so bitterly that the little girl had hastily surrendered Lushdale and taken up her quarters at Bournemouth.

"I suppose it's some funny little complex," Mrs. Strangeways had said to her husband, then vicar of All Souls' in a large provincial town which need not be specified.

"Children sometimes get bemused by a name," Dr. Strangeways had replied. "Perhaps it happened that when we passed Lushdale in the train one of those inexplicable golden moods came upon the boy, as it will come upon children. I can remember such moods myself. Poor old Porter would probably maintain that Robin was in a toxic condition at the time. Charming old fellow, Porter, but utterly incapable of getting into a child's mind. I think I am a little bemused by the name myself. Joan dear, will you see to it that I'm made Dean of Lushdale?"

Mrs. Strangeways had laughed, but when it appeared that her husband was actually

on the verge of becoming Dean of Lushdale she laughed in quite another way. She laughed with Robin, and regarded her little boy's predilection as a portent. So Robin had come to Lushdale, and there, as he rounded the corner on his way from school, lay the great stone ship.

Now that he was so close at hand, it seemed that the ship had come to a standstill. It was resting there, waiting. Robin, with all the years before him, summer upon summer (how they stretched ahead!), was happy in the thought that the grey tower and the great sturdy walls and buttresses would be waiting still at the end of it all. When he was old, the Cathedral would come to his aid in some way that he did not try to define to himself. So think many little boys and girls with eyes like Robin's. The great comfortable things are waiting, however stressful the moment may be. Robin was finding the moment very wonderful as he pushed open the side door of the Deanery, having left upon the scraper what little of Lushdale mud still clung to his shoes. His mother greeted him with her arms full of drably-bound books, "Dad's sermon stuff." They were on their way to their new home, just as Robin had been a minute back. He wished he could impart something of his happiness to them. After all, one bookcase was very like another. With all the wisdom they contained, they could not tell him what it was that seemed to make

music in his heart as he flitted across the Close in the gathering dusk towards that golden stream that came from the fanlight above the Deanery door. His mother was very tall; that may have had something to do with the impression she so often gave Robin that she was quizzing him. Her mass of reddish-golden hair was in some disarray, for she had been exploring attics and cupboards that had not been built to her measure.

"Well, old man, was it very dreadful?"

A little smile tugged at the corners of Mrs. Strangeways' mouth. It was this little smile that had made the Dean refer to her as "Dear Lady Disdain" on several occasions. Robin knew that his mother never really sneered. So did the Dean for that matter.

"Oh, it wasn't so dusty," said Robin.

"Oh, don't speak of dust!" said his mother. "You should have seen this Cruden's *Concordance*," and she tapped the most depressed-looking of the volumes. "Have you met Flashman yet?"

Robin thought of Walker Major for a moment, but not being given to melodrama, he replied: "I don't think there's a villain at our school."

"Our school! Hear him talk! Well, come and have your tea at the fire where Hooker once warmed himself; or was it George Herbert? We've had both Mr. H.'s on the premises."

"And Queen Elizabeth," said Robin.

"And Bishop Poundall," added Mrs. Strangeways. "He must have popped in dozens of times. Then there was that bishop who made the Queen so angry. And last of all comes Robin Strangeways."

Before Robin sat down with the ambiguous shade, he put up a petition to the tall lady, his mamma: "If I get my lessons done, will you come out with me to look and see about?"

"We shouldn't be able to see anything."

"Oh, yes, mummy; there's going to be a moon. You forget I've hardly seen anything. Just a peep into the Cathedral, that's all I've had."

"The Cathedral will wait," his mother said. "It has been waiting for a few hundred years."

"Oh, mummy, be a sport!" said Robin.

Mrs. Strangeways could never resist this appeal; so in an hour or two a tall phantom lady and a small slim wraith made themselves one with the dream city. Lushdale was very quiet. The chimes that seemed to ponder over the hours through the day gave out to the night air a note more insistent. One could not but think of time as one stood wrapped in a silver mist and listened.

Mrs. Strangeways' long and muscular arm went about Robin's meagre shoulders. She was sparing of her caresses; but the chime had made her feel after Robin's youth and steadfastness.

"It's nice to feel we're part of it, isn't

it, Robin ? " she said. " Even for a little while."

" A little while ? " echoed her son. " Why, daddy's the youngest Dean in England. That's what they put under his photo in the paper."

" I'm frightfully young, too," said Mrs. Strangeways ; " but I can't expect more than fifty years here. You'll be tired of Lushdale by then, Robin."

" No," said Robin dispassionately. " You are wrong there, mummy. I shan't be tired of Lushdale until I'm so old that I shall be tired of everything."

" When I am too old to walk about our city," said Mrs. Strangeways, " I shall drive about in a governess cart like an old lady I saw to-day. Such a queer old bird ; as tall as I am, with a great green cloak and a poke bonnet. I shouldn't call her a bird, I suppose. It was her nose. Such a hook."

" Don't be horrid, mummy. You're as bad as old Nanny. You'll be saying she had a hump on her back."

" She had a hump on her back, but she'd a cockatoo on her shoulder. They call her Granny Maloney."

" Granny Maloney ! I heard one of the chaps at school singing something about Granny Maloney. I've a lot to learn about Lushdale."

" Yes ; the Knight is not our only celebrity."

" The Knight ? What Knight, mummy ? "

"*The* Knight, of course. The Knight of Lushdale. Do you mean to say your father hasn't told you about him?"

"Daddy's been telling me nothing but what I must do and what I mustn't do at the Choir School. You forget, mummy dear, that he's been very busy; and then I've been away at Granny's, not Granny Maloney's, Granny Strangeways. You couldn't say Granny Strangeways had a hook. Tell me about the Knight, mummy dear."

"Haven't you been to the Lady Chapel, where the Knight's window is?"

"Oh, I haven't seen anything yet, mummy! You forget that beastly old pneumonia."

"Oh, do I?" said his mother. "How good of Gran to ask you to Oakfield just when we were flitting, and you were seedy. Well, to-morrow or Saturday I'll take you to look at the Knight's window, and try to tell you about him, though you'll soon learn of him at school. Now let's race home. I'm feeling shivery."

Robin slipped his hand into his mother's, and they took to their heels. It was a most undecanal proceeding; but, as Mrs. Strangeways had said, she was frightfully young, and represented her county in all kinds of manly sports. They arrived at the Dean's door like something out of the Apocalypse, and sat down on the white stone step to recover breath. The Cathedral chime gave out ten o'clock. They listened to the refrain that

was to become woven into their thoughts by day and their dreams by night. Then the single bell dealt out the hours. It almost seemed that the great bell let them go reluctantly. Robin counted them out like coins. Mrs. Strangeways laughed. I suppose they were both very happy.

## CHAPTER II

### THE KNIGHT OF LUSHDALE

ROBIN had come to Lushdale only a day before his introduction to the Choir School, so that he had little time for exploring the Cathedral until his first Saturday in his new home. On that day his mother set aside an hour to go into the matter of the Knight of Lushdale. Robin and she chose their time. Mr. Plumtree, the senior verger, always began with the Lady Chapel, where the Knight's window reposed, when he conducted a party of visitors. Thence he worked westward and northward, finishing finally at the altar and apse. So it came about that Mrs. Strangeways and her son had the Lady Chapel to themselves. On that sharp, clear autumn morning the coloured glass of the Knight's window had a gem-like brightness. Every detail of the picture stood out for Robin's delectation.

What he saw, as he gazed upwards, while the winter sunlight struck upon him, and the sound of Mr. Plumtree's incantation grew fainter and fainter, was the figure of a knight in chain mail and surcoat void of any emblem. The Knight smiled. It was not a tortured, ascetic smile, or a smile of beatific triumph,

such as Robin had always associated with stained glass. He was a somewhat snub-nosed man, who might have been thirty-five or six. His jaw just escaped heaviness, and his hair was cut across his forehead in a fringe, much in the manner that Robin affected himself. He held his plumed helm in his ungauntleted hand, and smiled with a rueful humour. At the same time, there was a world of pity and understanding in his expression. In the long grass at his feet crouched strange little furry animals that might have puzzled any zoologist; and a flock of birds in rather uncomfortable perspective beat with their wings the turquoise sky behind his head.

"Who is he, mummy?" Robin, as he peered up at the Knight, had something in common with the little furred beasties that looked up, too.

"I shan't tell you if you're going to turn into one of those bunnies," laughed Mrs. Strangeways, half afraid at the largeness of his eyes.

"Oh, mummy! Who is he?"

"He's the man they say has never grown weary of Lushdale."

"Yes, yes! But who is he? Isn't he jolly?"

"They say he still comes back," his mother went on. "Of course, that's bogey-bogey talk, but it's a pretty idea. Most tales of revenants aren't pretty."

"What's a revenant, mum?"

"People who come back after they're supposed to be dead."

"'To the glory of God, and in memory of John Fleming,'" Robin translated the Latin.

"'Eight years mayor of Lushdale,'" continued Mrs. Strangeways.

"'Here have we no abiding city, but we seek one to come,'" Robin read the inscription in English, skilfully let in at the foot of the window.

"That was added a little while ago," his mother said. "Bishop Blundell had it done. It was one of several things he had done in memory of his son, the poet. The Reference Library at the Museum is another thing; and a drinking-trough at Lushdale Bend is another. So that window is really a memorial to two Johns: John Fleming and John Blundell."

"Who was John Fleming, mummy?"

"He was eight years mayor of Lushdale."

"Yes, of course. Mr. Cuthbertson is mayor of Lushdale, but he's not like that."

"My dear Robin, that's not John Fleming. That's the Knight of Lushdale."

"Who is the Knight of Lushdale?"

"I'll tell you as well as I can, though the best way would be to read John Blundell's poem about him."

"You tell me, dearest. You told me about Christian far better than John Bunyan."

"Well, I'll try," said Mrs. Strangeways. "First I must tell you about John Fleming. He was a corn merchant in Lushdale, but he was also an artist. One day he came into the Cathedral and found a knight kneeling at prayer in the Lady Chapel. As he came in, the knight got up and went out, smiling at him as he passed. Other people saw the knight after this. It seemed he came to Lushdale quite often. He would bait his mare at the Resting Angel, and walk through the streets to the Cathedral."

"The Resting Angel? That was the hotel daddy wrote from when he came to spy out the land."

"Yes. It's still there, or part of it. They called it an inn in those days, which sounds nicer."

"Why did he go to the Cathedral?"

"Why does anybody go to a Cathedral? We go for all sorts of reasons, I suppose. Some people go because they've a quarter of an hour before the train goes. Some people go to see what they can see. Some people go to hear the singing. Oh, there are all sorts of reasons; but the Knight seems to have gone to say his prayers. When he'd said them he passed on. He never ate anything in Lushdale, never spoke to any one, but he smiled upon all he met, and people declared they felt better for his smile. He would walk back to the Resting Angel, have his mare saddled, and then ride away towards Mallow

Ford. It really was a ford in those days; there wasn't any railway bridge. People used to hear his voice coming back on the wind as he went up the hill. He rode up through the trees singing. One day the mayor stopped him, and asked him to come home and take a capon and a bottle of wine, and talk of himself, but the Knight only smiled and said, 'Here have we no abiding city, but we seek one to come. Great is the love I bear your town. Therefore I must not tarry.' Then the mayor said, 'But would you not show your love for our town by dwelling with us for a little space?' The Knight shook his head and replied, 'As Mallow River blesses your town by passing continually to the sea, so must I bless your town by passing continually from the sea to the sky. God prosper all who dwell here; and, sir, God bless your granaries.' Then he bowed, and went off. John Fleming's granaries seem to have prospered like anything, for he became very rich. He was able to travel abroad. He believed that all his prosperity was due to the Knight, and he brought that window back with him when he returned from over the sea. Nobody knows where he had it made; but he must have painted the Knight's picture himself, or drawn it. Some think that it comes from Flanders, because of the mayor's name, but nobody knows. He had it put there as a memorial to himself, and he wrote a little book about

the Knight, and that's where John Blundell got the idea for his poem."

During this recital Robin's eyes had never left the Knight's face.

"And he still comes, mummy? He still passes through, and blesses Lushdale on his way to the sky?"

He seemed like some one who had come upon the answer to a conundrum, only to be presented with a further riddle. He knew now why he had always wanted to come to Lushdale. It was the city that the Knight loved. But who was the Knight?

"Oh no, Robin," his mother answered gently, "he doesn't come any more."

It was a year since Robin and she had bidden farewell to Peter Pan and Santa Claus.

"I expected he wanted to stay most dreadfully sometimes," Robin went on, half to himself. "It must have made him want to stay when he passed by the open windows and saw the families having dinner."

Then he seemed to come upon another enlightening thought.

"Perhaps if he had stayed then, he wouldn't be able to come now."

"You funny old man," his mother said. She was thinking of John Blundell's portrait in the Reference Library. Robin had his eyes. She was beginning to feel that Robin had heard as much of the Knight as was good for him.

"Never tell me you can't stand still again," she went on. "You'll be growing into a stained glass window yourself, if you stick here much longer." And she gently propelled her son in the direction of the western door.

Out in the sunlight, two little boys were Blondinising on the railings about Bishop Poundall's statue. Robin darted off in their direction. He could never witness an exhibition by people of tight-rope walking, without feeling an overpowering urge to emulate them. At any other time she might have restrained him, but she felt a secret relief at the sudden shifting of interest. On the morrow, Robin took his place by his mother's side in the Cathedral. He would have liked to be with his schoolfellows, for then he would have had a view of the Lady Chapel. Unfortunately, tradition was against him. The Dean's family had always occupied places in the north aisle; and, to quote from a frequent utterance of Walker Major, "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be," the Dean's family would always occupy those places.

"I'm afraid," said Miss Prendergarst to Mrs. St. Clair, "that the Dean's little boy is a fidget."

"Oh, I don't know," Mrs. St. Clair replied. She was always saying "Oh, I don't know," with a propitiatory drawl which annoyed Miss Prendergarst.

"Children will be children," Mrs. St. Clair

continued. She seldom ventured to contravert Miss Prendergarst on their homeward walk across the Close. She came away from the Cathedral charged, as it were, with the atmosphere of peace and goodwill. She was the least contentious of ladies, but the sight of something young in the room of the late Dean's three daughters had stirred in her strange promptings to rebellion.

"The new Dean's a bit of a fidget himself, it seems to me," said Miss Tomlinson, who did not share Mrs. St. Clair's scruples with regard to Miss Prendergarst.

"A volatile man," said Mrs. St. Clair. "We were told we were to have a volatile man."

"Well," said Miss Prendergarst, "I wish his little boy would keep still. His head went swivelling round to the south continually."

"Perhaps he can't help it," said Miss Tomlinson. "Perhaps it's glands. They're putting everything down to glands nowadays. Did you hear that lecture on nerve control by that person from Letchworth?"

"I liked Mrs. Strangeways' hat," said Mrs. St. Clair; and then she added, "It's not easy for a Dean's wife."

"Why should it be difficult for a Dean's wife to choose a hat?" asked Miss Prendergarst, a shade peevishly. She disliked Mrs. St. Clair's vagueness and overflowing tolerance. She disliked Miss Tomlinson, whom she always had in mind when she heard St. Paul's

admonition to the Greeks. She herself detested the new things.'

"Well," said Miss Tomlinson, "whatever one might have said of poor old Dean Jennings, one wouldn't have accused him of being volatile."

Miss Prendergarst sniffed.

"Mr. Little assures me the new Dean is a 'live wire.'"

"Poor Mr. Little," said Mrs. St. Clair.

"Why this compassion?" asked Miss Prendergarst. "I consider Mr. Little has a subversive influence here."

"Oh, I don't know," said Miss Tomlinson, with such a startling reproduction of Mrs. St. Clair's drawl that Miss Prendergarst looked at her sharply through the twin conning-towers of her horn-rimmed spectacles. She did not like Mrs. St. Clair,—but still there were the conventions. It was hard to tell whether Mrs. St. Clair had felt the shaft.

"Probably not," thought Miss Prendergarst, "those pink people are notoriously obtuse."

"A subversive influence in every way," she continued aloud; "I don't see that anything is gained by telling a roomful of women to 'pull up their socks.' It's merely silly."

"And inaccurate," added Miss Tomlinson. "All the same, I don't agree with you about Mr. Little. After all, the Friars reformed men by exchanging coarse jests with them."

"But Mr. Little isn't coarse," said Miss

Prendergarst. "He is merely puerile. And what is it exactly that he wants to reform?"

"He wants to see Lushdale clasp the skirts of progress," said Miss Tomlinson. "By the way, I wish Mr. Little's metaphors were not all in the soft goods line."

"Progress," snapped Miss Prendergarst. "Vulgarity and charlatanism."

"Blessed are the peacemakers," thought Mrs. St. Clair; and stood in with a word or two on the new Dean's sermon.

"Talking of progress, I thought the Dean quoted Browning very nicely: 'The ringing grooves of change.' By the way, it is Browning, isn't it?"

"One of the eminent Victorians," said Miss Tomlinson. "Does it matter which? They all helped to swell the angelic choir."

Miss Prendergarst became something of a pink person herself.

"I was rather disappointed," continued Mrs. St. Clair placidly, "that he made no reference to the Knight of Lushdale."

"Oh, were you?" said Miss Prendergarst. "Personally, I was very relieved that he kept his hands off our Knight. Visitors always seem to think we expect it of them to drag him in."

"The Dean isn't a visitor," said Miss Tomlinson.

"In a sense," said Mrs. St. Clair, "he is."

Her mild china-blue eyes were bright with wonder at her own temerity.

"Oh, Mrs. St. Clair," said Miss Tomlinson, "you're not going to be metaphysical?"

"Here have we no abiding city, but we seek one to come," said Miss Prendergarst. Apparently she thought that the best way of dealing with the impending text was to quote it herself.

"Exactly," said Mrs. St. Clair, "the Knight had his idea of progress."

"The Knight lived in an age when people were not ashamed of their faith," said Miss Prendergarst. "He would not have made progress a stalking-horse for Theosophical summer schools, and Esperanto conferences."

"What exactly is a stalking-horse?" asked Miss Tomlinson. "I wish I had your intuitions about the state of the Knight's mind, Miss Prendergarst. For my part, I rather cling to the theory that he would smile on Mr Little's ideals if he were actually to turn up."

Here the ways parted, and the three ladies made for their respective homes with hearty appetites for their several joints of roast beef.

Robin ferreted among the volumes in his father's library that afternoon in the hope of coming upon some further word of the Knight. The Dean, however, routed him out before he had come on anything of the two Johns.

"Out you come, bookworm, codlinmoth. Much study hath made thee peaky."

Dr. Strangeways walked off with Robin tucked under his arm like the bishop in the Bab Ballad.

"Where's his hat? Where's the boy's hat?"

"Here," said Mrs. Strangeways, producing the trencher. "Don't go too far, or you'll be late for evensong."

Robin found himself trotting beside the volatile gaiters in the direction of Lushmount.

"Well, what does the boy like best in Lushdale?" His father rattled the question at him as he strode along, twirling a walking-stick that seemed a size too large for him. When the Dean played cricket, his bat always had that same appearance of a misfit, but he made quite a number of runs, as a rule, in an indeterminate, sketchy fashion.

"I like the Knight," said Robin.

"Ah, yes, yes," said the Dean. "Poor, dear old Porter used to say that Lushdale had two great men. Bishop Poundall and John Fleming. The first was a great theologian. The second was a great fool. Poor old Porter! What a mind! What a storehouse. Yet 'One thing thou lackest.' Yes, yes, He could never resist anything that looked like an epigram. A great theologian and a great fool."

Robin looked up at his father. He had not to look so very far. He was filled with a sudden concern, something almost amounting to a protective instinct. It would be dreadful if his father were to declare John Fleming a fool. Robin regarded the rakish top hat and the resolute profile as he might watch a friend on his trial.

"*You* don't think John Fleming was a fool, do you, daddy?" he asked.

The Dean came to a sudden halt. He turned and surveyed Robin contemplatively.

"Porter called him a sentimental tradesman. Well, I suppose he was. No, Robin, no. I should hesitate to say that John Fleming was a fool. St. Francis acted like a fool. No, no, no, no. I should say John Fleming was a man of sensibility. Do you know the difference between sentiment and sensibility, boy?"

"Isn't that what Jane Austen writes about, daddy?"

"Many people have written about it. I shall expect a three-volume treatise from you on the subject, Robin. Great Scott! do you know the time?"

They turned and sped in the direction of the Cathedral. Despite the pace, Robin had enough breath to ask his father one more question. It was such a tremendous question that he might have reserved it for a more dignified occasion. But Robin wanted to know.

"Daddy," he quavered, "do you believe the Knight comes back to Lushdale?"

"Take my hand," said the Dean, "we'll have to run."

Robin obeyed.

"Well, Robin," the Dean jerked out, as the gaiters settled down to eight miles an hour, "I'm a doctor of divinity, and a master of

arts, and one or two other things. It's very humiliating that with all those letters after my name, when you come to me with a simple question like that I can only reply, 'I don't know.'"

That evening Miss Prendergarst noted with displeasure that the Dean's little boy fell fast asleep during Canon Bidwell's sermon.

## CHAPTER III

### PRAISE

ROBIN started up in bed. Some one was singing. The house was very still; no other sound came through the open window but that easy and perfect singing.

Then he heard the Cathedral chimes, that elusive refrain that people found so difficult to remember; and then twelve strokes. It was odd for there to be singing in the street at that hour. Robin thought back. He had gone to bed at the close of his first Sunday. He had been very drowsy. He must have fallen asleep the moment his head touched the pillow. Who would be singing so late on a Sunday night, or, rather, in the first moments of a Monday morning? And how he sang! clearly and happily, with a strength controlled so finely that Robin, as he listened, felt a weight was lifted from him. It seemed impossible for anything to be difficult or heavy while the Knight sang.

Of course it was the Knight. Who else would be singing in Mitre Lane at that hour, singing such a song, in such a way? Robin knew what plainsong was. It made him think of plainsong with a difference. A little

breeze shook the wisteria by the open window of his low and narrow room. He slipped out of bed, and tip-toed into the pool of moonlight chequered by the criss-cross of the one closed casement. Kneeling upon the sill, he listened and peered.

Mitre Lane seemed quite empty, but the singing went on. Then Robin heard the clamp of horse's hoofs. The Knight was riding down Mitre Lane, singing. Presently he would pass under Robin's window. He was riding on his mare, unseen, and singing in praise of Lushdale. As the voice passed beneath the wisteria, Robin caught every word. It seemed that the Knight was tossing his song to and fro, from Latin to English, and back from English again to Latin. It was not so easy to follow the Latin; but the English was all in praise of Lushdale. He praised the stones of Lushdale, the flowers, the children, the bells of Lushdale, the old men and young men, the damsels and dames. He praised the waters of the Mallow, and the three stout bridges that spanned the river on its way through Lushdale. It almost made Robin laugh to hear the town praised so whole-heartedly. If he had not been so lost in wonder he might have laughed. He had read the praise of places in his poetry book. He had heard people sing with evident passion of Erin or Bredon, or even of Dixie. Never before had he heard such perfection of praise. The Knight was saying for him what he would have said of

Lushdale three years ago, had he been granted the gift of tongues. He praised Lushdale as Robin would have praised it, had it not been for what he had seen in the playing-ground of the Choir School. The Knight made no exceptions. Everything in Lushdale was lovely and pleasant. Robin knew that when he praised the lads of Lushdale, he was including Walker Major. Robin shivered as the voice died away.

"Well, now I know," he whispered to himself. "He does come back." He was not exactly afraid. The Knight's song had been too reassuring for that. Yet there was something overwhelming in such praise: something rather terrible. Robin remembered how he had run home through Martyr Street at the close of the Saturday. The street lamps were lit, and shone upon the faces of the people. He had thought of *Pilgrim's Progress*. The city was pure gold, and the people walked up and down transformed.

It is so with us all, I suppose, at times—but how soon the mood vanishes. It was always like that with the Knight when he passed through the streets of Lushdale.

Robin shivered, and sought his white bed.

# CHAPTER IV

## WINIFRED COOT

EVERY one who has lived in Lushdale for any time knows The Trout and Pike, that ancient river-side hostelry from whose landing stage an earlier Lushdale poet than John Blundell is said to have fished the Mallow for hours on end, with very poor results as far as his basket was concerned, though his long vigils were fruitful in another direction. Timothy Hill has him to the life in his book on Lushdale worthies. He quotes "The River without mercy" at some length. It is very improbable that Winifred Coot had ever heard of this melancholy singer. Her range of reading was not wide. She preferred to study life on her own account from the landing stage of her father's inn. . . . Winifred Coot's earliest recollection was intermingled with the historic waters of the Mallow. At the age of four she had been fished from the river at the end of a quaint pole. Winifred sometimes used to indulge the fancy that the river had given her birth, which was not unnatural, seeing that she had no recollection of anything prior to her emergence therefrom. The lack of a mother seemed to favour this notion. Mrs. Coot had not survived long to

enjoy the sight of her baby girl, and Winifred had grown up by Mallow side like an amphibious sprite, alternatively loving and dreading the river. . . . If you had chanced to be in Lushdale two summers before the Great War you might have come upon her, seated astride a mooring post at the end of her father's landing stage. Like as not she would have importuned you from her throne in a shrill treble.

"Want a boat, mister?"

Little Winifred was never happier than when she was marshalling the fleet around her father's premises, or swabbing about under seats and stretchers, whacking cushions, and generally making things ship-shape. A strange little figure she made with her nimble brown legs that always looked unproportionately long. She generally wore an attenuated frock and knickers of butcher blue, and her black hair, parted down the middle and braided into pigtails, was sometimes tied with ribbon, but oftener with coloured rag. Winifred shed hair ribbons like blossoms. Her ancestors, who hailed from Bagley Wood, had a similar weakness for scattering odd bits of colour about, if we are to believe Matthew Arnold's description in *The Scholar Gipsy*. One would have declared, had one not known otherwise, that Winifred Coot hailed from Italy. She might have strayed out of some picture of the Holy Family. Indeed her father, who knew Italy only through the strange books that he read, often called her Bambino.

From her early infancy the child had seen nothing of her mother's folk. Ezra had kept his daughter jealously to himself. There were Powells lingering on at Lushdale after the debacle. It was a way with folk of Lushdale to cling to the place in face of all disaster. Ezra had theories about the up-bringing of Winifred. She was to enjoy a prolonged age of innocence, to be taught at home, and to grow up with a deep devotion to The Trout and Pike of which she was one day to be mistress. He established a sister at the inn, who was to overlook Winifred's upbringing. Since his wife's death Ezra Coot had lived in an atmosphere of melancholy and mysticism. He read many strange books, and his reading and meditations, coupled, perhaps, with somewhat frequent draughts from his cellar, had blinded him to the fact that his sister was a very indolent woman. He was aroused from his bemusement on that occasion when little Winifred fell into the river, but he soon had his misgivings hushed by the plausible tongue of Sarah Coot.

So little Winifred had grown up almost within sound of the Lushdale chime—indeed when a wind blew from the west she could catch the tune as she listened by the window of her little room, and yet she was a comparative stranger to Lushdale—Lushdale at its heart. It is true to say that up to the age of eight she could treasure but one memory of the Cathedral Close. That was a memory to

be treasured indeed. She knew that the woman who made her little frocks and things came from Lushdale, that the van which brought so many goods that were nice to eat or to look upon came from Lushdale. Everything seemed to have its origin in that name. She had often begged her father to take her to the Cathedral town where the bells rang and they made those long sticks of peppermint with "Lushdale" written from end to end, so that however hard you sucked, you could not obliterate that alluring name. Her father had always answered "Some day, Winifred," and gone back to his books and his business. At last the day came, and perhaps the reason of its wonder was that it came in such an unceremonious, haphazard fashion.

It was her father's habit occasionally to put off in the smaller of his pleasure boats, and, when he was thus minded, Winifred would sometimes perch herself on the prow, like an equestrian, with a brown foot immersed in the water on either side. It delighted her thus to feel the water rushing through her toes as she faced up stream like a live figure-head. It was thus that she found herself upon a very beautiful day in late summer—a day so still that the whirr and boom of insect life about the banks of the Mallow was like a psalm. White-faced cattle turned to watch the voyagers as they passed, and Winifred counted three larks, distinct points of pulsing sound in the almost cloudless sky. Ezra Coot bent

over his sculls, and sent the craft along at a goodly rate, for the Mallow thereabout is affected by the tide, and there was little resistance to the cutting prow, and to Winifred's small brown feet. Ezra Coot began to sing as he rowed, and this was a thing so unusual that Winifred felt her small body thrill with a strange happiness.

> To rest awhile on a river's bosom,
> This is to rest in the hand of God.

He quoted from the writing of that erstwhile patron of The Trout and Pike. Then he laughed. In the silence that followed Winifred listened for something. It came—the Lushdale chime, quite distinctly, that refrain that a visitor will assiduously hum to himself, and forget, until his memory be refreshed at the turn of another hour.

"Oh, how pretty," cried Winifred, "and how big!"

"Yes. It's pretty, Chavati. This would be a pretty day to see Lushdale."

Then Ezra settled down to the sculls again, and never paused till he came to the great stone bridge in the heart of the town, the bridge where John Blundell had leaned when he composed his poem, where Robin was often to pause, and feel himself a citizen of no mean city. Winifred swept up to that resting place like the figure of youth at the prow. She passed gardens and smooth lawns that ran

down to the river's edge, and walls of brick that showed mysterious little doors.

The little stir that the boat made set the late sunlight dancing upon the water as it lapped against stone steps, or went whispering down some arched and mysterious way. Winifred shaded her eyes. The chime rang out goldenly. Lushdale was a city of gold. She had come upon it unawares, just as she was, hatless and unshod, straight from her play and her dreams. That was surely the way to come upon her city. Ezra's face was a mellow red, like the walls they had passed. Winifred had never seen him in such a jocund mood.

"Where do you think you are, child?" he said. "This is the town where the streets are paved with gold."

He found accommodation for his boat, and then took his daughter on to his back. So he walked with her over the bridge, and towards the great tower of the Cathedral. They paused at a timbered shop with pretty but inadequate mullioned windows, and there Winifred was made to look a shade less wild by the purchase of stockings and sandals. Ezra seemed to enjoy making the purchase, for the girl who served them had a voice in keeping with the quiet of that afternoon, and her hair happened to be very light and abundant. His face clouded, however, at the entrance of a somewhat massive lady with white hair and very pink cheeks. The lady's blue eyes were kindly as they looked down upon Winifred, however.

The child's preoccupation with those long black legs seemed to amuse and touch her. She was gone away in a minute, warned off, perhaps, by Ezra's perfunctory greeting. . . . Winifred had never had quite such a pair of stockings. Out in the street again it seemed that she walked like a pilgrim who has won his turban. Next came a purchase of Lushdale rock from a shop that looked just like an enlargement of Winifred's dolls' house. It seemed absurd, if not irreverent, to mention these things along with Winifred's first sight of the Knight's window. However, if one would get inside the little girl's mind it is necessary to mention trivial things. . . . There were great things about which to ask her father questions. There were the remains of the old town wall. There was the statue that faced them as they turned into the Close. There was the Cathedral itself. Everything, however, culminated in her first sight of the Knight's window.

She came upon it when the light was just beginning to fail in the Lady Chapel. Outside she could hear the voices of children, as one will hear them, continuous and shrill in their play. The sound came softened by the intervening walls. Desultory traffic murmured in the street. In the chancel Mr. Plumtree was lighting the candles for Evensong, a slimmer Mr. Plumtree than Robin ever knew, for this was some years before his coming. Ezra Coot spoke no word as he stood before the window

with his daughter. He knew the legend, of course, and took it for granted that the little one had been duly instructed by that governess he paid so handsomely. Winifred, of course, had heard of the Knight. It is hard to say what kept her tongue-tied as she stood there by her father's side. It is a way with some children. One may call it awkwardness or sensibility, according to one's way of regarding the child. Ezra's silence was born of something deeper. He belonged to a class which had laid a slow siege upon Lushdale. He knew that the Close resented his marriage with Hilda Powell very deeply. Was Mallow Common included in the Knight's benediction, or was his smile only for the covenanted? The Knight of Lushdale would have to be catholic indeed, thought Ezra Coot, as he stood with his hand upon his little girl's head. He had draped the black hair with his red handkerchief so that the child should not offend against an old tradition. Nevertheless he felt the extraordinaty influence of the time and place. He was very glad he had yielded to that impulse to row all the way to Lushdale.

There followed a wonderful meal at the Mallow tea rooms, where one sat in little compartments like old-fashioned pews, and reverently partook of Lushdale buns and Mallow pasties, and drank tea from thick fluted blue cups that had been made at the potteries by Mallow Ford. . . . Ezra conceded to Winifred the right to pour out. He

sat and watched the solemn proceeding with a vestige of fun in his unhappy eyes. Then once more they were out in the golden street. Winifred's mind was confused with a hundred happy impressions, but in the retrospect, as she snuggled in the stern of the boat, with one hand trailing in the water, and the receding lights of Lushdale twinkled their benediction, the face and figure of the Knight was uppermost in her heart. For the weeks that followed she had her images of the Cathedral town to tend and polish, as it were, in her mind; and when the wash of a barge or motor boat whispered against the timbers of the landing stage, she could look upon the passengers in a new light. They had been to Lushdale, or were bound thither. They would pass by the decorous houses, and those trim and prosperous shops with the sunlight all about them, and within the quiet Cathedral that mysterious figure would make them welcome.

When she went to Lushdale again there would be more wonders to be found in the town. Winifred never entered that particular Lushdale again. When next she went, it was to the dentist, and it rained. She went with her Aunt Sarah, and when she reached home her father beat her on several counts. Winifred had been very naughty indeed. Nevertheless, there remained that first and separate impression that was not to be expunged by any subsequent disillusionment. . . . Ezra

Coot was never revisited by that good mood, and little Winifred was kept for the most part within hail of The Trout and Pike. Sometimes she ventured down stream to that tract of flat riverside country which is known as the Willows. There lurked in that shadowy country all those fabulous beings of whom her governess gave her word, together with a brood of sprites and gnomes of her own making. She seldom ventured far from her landing stage after dusk. The sweep of the long green tresses in the water held a menace for her. It seemed that they were pulled against their will, away from Lushdale, and towards the sea. So it was with the child. The willows insistently called her away from the staid beauty of the old town. Something really had happened upon that summer day. Winifred had gone in company with the Knight, had she but known it. The mare's hoofs had trodden the buttercups noiselessly. This is a story of a very great thing and of many little happenings. It was something large that caused the Knight to tarry at Lushdale. It was Robin's belief in the goodness of things, Robin's optimism if you will. He was not able to set his longing down in a poem or picture or sonata, which is, after all, rather an evasion of our faith than a satisfaction. Robin was a poet in action. He dared to challenge the golden moment, and declared that all life could be compounded of such essence.

He was wrong, of course, but no great thing

rose up to prove him so, only a series of little things, things that people do not seem able to help. It would be easy to write down the Cathedral folk as a narrow-minded set, to speak of the Knight hounded out of that Close corporation, but this would not be an honest or accurate statement of the facts. The spirit of hospitality was not dead in Miss Prendergarst, for instance, nor the longing that goes with perception. It just happened that she had inherited prejudices, was holden to conventions that would either have to disappear before the Knight, or else drive him from the place. Who could blame Miss Prendergarst from looking upon Winifred Coot with something akin to horror. Her innermost being revolted when Ezra Coot had been allotted the part of Hilda Powell's lover for the performance of a light opera in the Lushdale theatre. It mattered not that Ezra Coot was particularly well qualified, both in voice and person, for the part. He was not of the Close. He had insinuated himself into that community by sheer perseverance, and by the apt use of his money and his voice.

Ezra Coot's father had enriched himself by farming out contracts for baskets made of the fine osiers one may still cut in the lower reaches of the Mallow. Ezra had dealt successfully in horses, and had become proprietor of The Trout and Pike when still a very young man. He had been ambitious to found a new dynasty. The Coots of the future were to be

gentle folk. He succeeded up to the point of marrying Hilda Powell. That was the event that Miss Prendergarst always alluded to as the debacle, though in truth Hilda Powell offended less in the eyes of the Church than others of her unfortunate family. Canon Powell was an unfortunate man altogether. When the stage love-making had turned to the real thing, and Hilda Powell, despite her father's tears and entreaties, had gone upon Ezra's arm to the Lushmount parish church, Miss Prendergarst's resentment shifted from Ezra to the shoulders of that beautiful but headstrong girl. It was not mollified by the arrival of little Winifred. It turned to panic and remorse on the death of the young mother. Miss Prendergarst had loved Hilda Powell in her queer way. It had been otherwise with Mrs. St. Clair. To her a baby was a baby whoever its parents might be, and only the savage pride of Ezra Coot had kept her from taking little Winifred to her arms.

It had been a very happy coincidence that Mrs. St. Clair had come into the shop when Winifred was trying on her new stockings. Mrs. St. Clair was coloured by the light of that afternoon in the little girl's mind. No doubt it was for that reason that she was able to come to Winifred's help on a future occasion. For the time being, however, Mrs. St. Clair had been warned off by Ezra's dark glance, and the child continued to live her strangely circumscribed life. She was not of Lushdale,

nor was she of Mallow Common where the Gipsies dwelt, though there was that in her blood which made her feel the call both of the Common and the Close. What will become of Winifred Coot? This was the question that often forced itself into the benevolent mind of Mrs. St. Clair. It was a very pertinent question. Ezra, with the selfishness of so many dreamers, refused to see any problem in the matter of his daughter's future. She was well fed, and had good schooling. For the rest she belonged to him, and with him she would remain in exile from the Close. He may not have realized how terrifying were the glimpses he gave his child into the hinterland of his mind, a mind drenched as it were with exotic reading. Winifred would sometimes lie awake through the night listening to her father muttering in his sleep. She would ram the end of her sheet into her ears as the muttering rose to a scream. Unwittingly Ezra added to the army of goblins that lurked about the Willows.

Then there came a morning when she went by that way and came upon something that was neither goblin, elf nor bogey, something that disturbed her strangely, and yet at the same time changed the nature of that No Man's Land. It was the sound of a whistle, played with great abandon and skill within a dense little patch of riverside jungle. Winifred was drawn towards the sound despite herself. Presently she was aware of a pair of dark eyes

peering out at her through the thicket. She would not have been surprised if she had made out horns and hoofs and shaggy beard, for she had read of Pan. What she actually separated from the green bloom was a crouching body clothed in a ragged shirt, and corduroy knickerbockers. The bare legs showed white against the green. They were hunted eyes that looked out at her, and yet there seemed a wild mockery in them that Winifred found disconcerting but provocative. She was thrilled with a sense of adventure. For the first time in her life the Willows seemed human to her.

"Hallo," spake a hoarse little voice. Winifred saw the whistle wiped on a grey sleeve.

"Hallo," she replied.

"Do you know Jasper Lovall?" again spake the voice.

"Lovall that has the barge?"

The piper cleared his throat and spat. Then he said some things of Mr. Lovall which we need not repeat. The words sounded rather terrible on the lips of a child. Winifred turned pale.

"You mustn't swear," she said. "I'll go away if you swear."

The boy came closer to her with an odd crouching movement.

"Don't you tell him. Don't you tell——"

"Of course I won't tell. Have you run away?"

The boy nodded. Winifred noticed that his black shaggy head was stuck with green

flotsam. He had a very large mouth, and a curious wavering smile which Winifred found appealing. He looked half starved, but by no means broken in spirit.

"Look here," he said, and pulled up one leg of his loose trousers. "He done that."

Winifred shuddered at the sight of the terrible scar.

"I guess you're hungry," she said.

"I've eat some berries," said the boy. "They gives me the belly ache. That's why I was playing on my whistle."

"What's your name?" asked Winifred.

The boy lowered his eyes. His lashes were very long and fine. His smile was a ragged affair. Evidently the question had stirred up waters of bitterness.

"You might as well know," he said. "It's Ishmael."

"Ishmael," Winifred repeated the name softly to herself.

"Y-e-e-e-e-s," Ishmael neighed. "That's what my old man called me, so that old —— says. Nice name to give a bloke, wasn't it?"

"Do you belong here?" asked the little girl.

"Na-o-o. What do you take me for? I'm from Seven Dials. My old man come here a year ago. He was in with Jasper Lovall. He fell in the river. Chickered. I stayed with Jasper, but now I've 'opped it."

"You'll have to go to school," said Winifred.

"Been to school," said Ishmael. "No time for it."

"Well, what are you going to do now you've run away from Mr. Lovall?"

Ishmael laughed.

"I'm going to retire," he said. "Have you got an old man?"

Winifred nodded.

"Would he give me a job for a bit? I'm going on the stage some day."

"You," said Winifred. "What could you do?"

Ishmael rattled off a list of the things that he could do with such speed that Winifred caught her breath. The list began with boot-polishing, and ended with tight-rope walking.

"You'll have to go to school," said Winifred. Then she was struck anew with his emaciated appearance.

"Do you like cold roast duck?" she inquired.

Ishmael's large eyes grew moist. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Don't be nasty," he said with a Cockney drawl upon the last word.

"Stay there," said Winifred. "I'll bring you something to eat."

Ishmael shivered.

"It's cold here," he said.

Winifred considered.

"You can come and sit in my dad's big boat. Mind you don't let him see you."

"I don't think," said Ishmael.

Then he bobbed his head, and came up on Winifred's side of the green curtain of willows.

She took him by the hand and led him towards The Trout and Pike. So Winifred went with the first sprite she had reclaimed from that shadow land. She directed him to seek the shelter of her father's four-ton sloop It boasted a cabin where one could lie down. Then she made for the larder of The Trout and Pike. Presently she emerged with full hands, and held a circuitous course to Ishmael's hiding-place. As she watched him eat she was aware of a new element in her life, a life that had been so much coloured by that dream of distant Lushdale. Here was close and instant romance, something delicious and at the same time a little frightening. The eyes of this beaten and hungry fugitive laughed at her. Yet there was something in their mockery that might send her headlong upon a course of self-sacrifice for his sake. Winifred was not one to do things by halves. So the child was awakened from her dream. The Willows were no longer inhabited by spirits alone. That night she told herself that Ishmael was in a way more frightening than all the bogies, but she was very glad she had met him, Ishmael whose hand was against every man, and every man's hand against him. She did not know what part he was to play when she came to meet the Knight of Lushdale. For the moment, however, Ishmael disappeared, not before he had sworn an oath to Winifred that she would find him again by the Willows. He was true to his word, but

much water swept past those green tresses before his reappearance. Winifred heard next day from her Aunt Sarah that a boy without any lawful and visible means of support had been found in Mr. Blackett's barn, and sent to the Lushdale reformatory. Winifred's heart bled for Ishmael as she heard the description. There could be no mistake. He seemed to belong to the Willows. He would not be happy in the reformatory.

## CHAPTER V

### THE KNIGHT'S CHAMPION.

ROBIN went off to school next morning with his secret guarded. People might say this or that about the Knight of Lushdale. He knew. His knowledge was a source of dreamy happiness, but it did not exactly gird him up for the mélée of life at the Choir School. Robin's was no unusual experience so far as school was concerned. It was a very unknightly business. I would not have it thought that Robin deliberately capitulated to those forces which always seemed, to his mind, to have their protagonist in Walker Major. On the other hand, it cannot be said that an immediate revolution in favour of the Knight was brought about by "the new Dean's olive-branch." Thus it was that Walker referred to Robin. The face of the school humorist looking down at him, with the dingy concrete of the School fives court for background, seemed like a living negation of that spirit which informed the Knight's smile. Had Robin been granted the strength of ten by reason of his vision, he might have started a crusade with a smashing blow. If he could have broken that sneer, as he would have broken a caricature in glass of the Knight's

window, who knows what recusants he might have rallied to his side? There is no reason to suppose that he was the only boy in the Choir School who had smiled back at the Knight. It just happened that Robin, like so many others, found that it was not easy or expedient to smash everything that came in the way of his dreams. But if Robin failed in his allegiance to the Knight, that did not mean that he lost his belief in him. Sometimes as he made his way home from school, sore in spirit, and often as not sore in body—a little bundle of resentments and regrets—he would come upon the Knight in thought. He did not hear the song; but something would hold his attention: some little note of sight or sound or rhythm: a flight of rooks from the Cathedral tower, a splash of sunlight on the leaded windows or Mr. Goodeve's book shop—and that old love of Lushdale would come surging back. Since he knew why it was that he had so desired after Lushdale, there was a deeper satisfaction in such sudden realizations of the beauty of the old town.

"Perhaps he is passing through Lushdale now," Robin would think to himself; and he would put himself into the picture. He himself was part of that Lushdale which the Knight loved. He was one of those merrie scholars whom the Knight had encountered as they came through the gate of the King's Children. According to John Blundell, the Knight had only paused once on his way.

That was when the choristers had called to him.

> "The merrie scholars beckoned him ;
> Be bountiful, and tarry, Knight ! "

It was from such reverie that he was awakened by colliding with the woolly coat of Mrs. St. Clair as she was being bowed out of the shop by Mr. Goodeve. The bookseller did the honours of his shop with some pomp, despite his crutches.

"Ibsen on crutches, elongated, and converted to a belief in fairies." This was the Dean's description of Mr. Goodeve, whose shop he had begun to haunt shortly after his arrival.

"We must look it up, Mr. Goodeve, that's all." she was saying. "Dear, dear ! What memories. I shall be forgetting my own name next."

Mr. Goodeve peered over his glasses at Robin.

"Here's a young gentleman who's the latest from school," he said. "Try him, ma'am."

The bookseller smiled oddly at the small boy, his bundle of books, his battered trencher, and those large brown eyes. He, too, had noted the resemblance to John Blundell. He ran a large hand through his upstanding crop of white hair.

"Why, it's Robin Strangeways," said Mrs. St. Clair. "Why are you never at home when I call on your mother ? "

"I suppose I must be at school," said Robin with the hard practicality of one recalled from a reverie.

"Why, yes, of course," said Mrs. St. Clair. "But I know all about your new shirts, Robin. Your mother was buying you shirts at Smithson's this morning."

"What a mother! Fancy buying you shirts!" said Mr. Goodeve. "My word. Well, now I wonder if you can tell us. We can't recall the two last lines of the second last stanza."

"Poor John Blundell's poem, you know," said Mrs. St. Clair.

"Why 'poor John Blundell?' He was a a very happy man, I consider," said Mr. Goodeve.

"Well, he's dead, isn't he?" said Mrs. St. Clair.

"So is Keats," said Mr. Goodeve; "so is Chaucer for that matter. Have you noticed, too?"

"Little pitchers," replied Mrs. St. Clair. She, too, had found the resemblance. Her apprehensive blue eyes had followed the Dean's little boy along many ways. Something in the spare figure, and the small restless head, had awakened unsatisfied maternal instincts. The likeness to John Blundell was a further inducement to stare at Robin. She stared at him like a benevolent hen. Robin began to blush.

"The two last lines of the second stanza,"

Mr. Goodeve repeated; "and please forgive my shocking manners."

Robin counted off the verses on his fingers.

> "Your song goes fainting down the void;
> Be pitiful, and tarry, Knight!"

"Good boy," said Mr. Goodeve. "Go up top."

Mrs. St. Clair fumbled in her string bag.

"Yes, yes," she murmured to herself. "Fainting down the void."

The repletion of her string bag seemed to re-assure her in the face of that devastating penultimate line. Robin tried not to compare her face to Turkish Delight. It was a secret discourtesy of which the Knight would have been incapable.

"Does your mother allow you to eat boiled sweets?" said Mrs. St. Clair, as a tricoloured poke came to the surface. "Hold out your hand."

"Thank you," said Robin.

"Some day you must come to tea with me. Now, I really mean that, Robin. It would be rather an adventure to come to tea all by yourself; or would it just bore you? I wonder, I wonder?"

"Thank you very much," said Robin.

"You could bring the Knight with you as a chaperone," said Mr. Goodeve. "Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mrs. St. Clair.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Robin.

"Ha, ha!"

Who shall say whence came that fourth laugh? Mr. Goodeve peered up at the sky, then glimpsed the street from right to left. Mrs. St. Clair stared at Mr. Goodeve. Robin gazed wide-eyed at a reproduction in crayons of the Knight's window, surmounting a box of bargains by Mr. Goodeve's left crutch. So the little group remained for a moment or two; three entirely happy persons—unusual spectacle. Mrs. St. Clair broke the spell by dropping her string bag. Robin dashed to pick it up, and dropped his strapful of books. Mr. Goodeve turned back into his shop like a shame-faced boy.

"Good afternoon," said Robin.

"Then you'll come to tea?" said Mrs. St. Clair. "I'll write you a little note. That was very odd, wasn't it? Did you see Mr. Goodeve's face?"

"Yes," said Robin. He had almost said, "I saw yours, too," but remembered his manners. Both she and the bookseller had stood transformed for those few seconds.

"Did you hear a laugh?" said Mrs. St. Clair. Then she added: "Stuff and nonsense! We were all laughing. What was it we were laughing at?"

"He was saying I should bring the Knight to tea."

"I think you had better go home," Mr.

Goodeve called from the protection of his bookshelves. "Good afternoon."

Robin flourished his mortarboard, and took to his heels.

"That was funny," he said to himself. "The Knight *was* there."

As he turned in at the Deanery gate, his mother rose up to greet him with a trowel in her hand. She looked as tall and straight as one of those silver birches by the croquet lawn.

"Hallo, Robin," she said. "Things been going better to-day?"

"Not so dusty," Robin replied.

Of late, she had been anxious concerning her son. She had been prepared to hear of the usual troubles that beset an only child at school; but Robin puzzled her by the extraordinary fluctuations of his spirits. There were afternoons when he would come home white and pinched, with his eyes on guard against over-tender enquiries. There were other days when he smiled at her in the old merry way. In both moods he was equally uncommunicative. She could not know that when he smiled, it was because the Knight had awaited him at some corner to help him on his homeward way. It hurt her to think that Robin had become a stranger to her in so short a time.

"It is only a phase," she told herself. "After all, he has to work out his own salvation."

In very truth Robin was preoccupied. He was trying to work out, if not his salvation, at least some theory of loyalty to the Knight of Lushdale. Being a child, he did not labour in any ordered fashion. He was, perhaps, unconscious that he strove at all. If he had read anything of Robert Louis Stevenson beyond *Treasure Island*, and the two stories of Alan Brek, he might have been comforted by a phrase of the essayist, "I believe in an ultimate decency in things." That was what the Knight seemed to stand for; a certain unconquerable graciousness in life. The Knight was sad, but he smiled. Scorn had no part in him. He moved about among the folk of Lushdale, invisible, impalpable, loving all whom he met. Yes; he even loved Walker Major. Had he not praised every lad in Lushdale? Walker Major was Robin's principal stumbling-block. He almost despaired of signing-on with the Knight when he thought of that sneering face, that white dome of forehead, those abounding teeth. It was disgusting and humiliating to think how he hated Walker Major. He hated his cruelty. He hated his cleverness. Walker Major carried off school prizes in bulk; and all the information he garnered from these and other books he seemed to turn to the same use; the belittling of all that was pleasant and comely in Robin's eyes.

Dr. Strangeways had watched over Robin's early studies; and to be taught by the Dean

was to be whirled along the ways of thought at something of the speed of which he took his constitutionals. His son had gone to the Choir School with his head full of poetry and history, and enough of mathematics to place him among boys older than himself. He was, therefore, all the more vulnerable from Walker Major's point of view, who found in the Dean's olive-branch a peculiar target for the shafts of his satire. Add to this the fact that Robin was involuntarily candid of gaze, and not very quick at getting out of the way, and it will not be difficult to understand why he hated Walker Major. There was never a day when the Knight did not need a champion at the Choir School; and many a time did Robin fail him; but there came a particular morning when his faith was put to a test so sudden and direct that he was brought up against a law of his very being, and could not fail.

Among Walker's many accomplishments was the art of parody. He parodied discreetly for publication, and he parodied for select audiences. In due course, John Blundell's poem on the Knight of Lushdale claimed his attention. He worked upon the skit with gusto. This particular effusion belonged to the class which, for obvious reasons, he did not commit to print. He collected an audience about one of the great fireplaces of Big School, in the odd five minutes that preceded the dinner-bell. It happened that Robin had ensconced himself beside the same fireplace a

little in advance of Walker's coming ; so that, when a knot of Lushdalians collected in answer to their showman's call, the Knight's champion found himself wedged in by elbows and knees, and compelled to come into Walker's feast of wit.

"Don't go, Birdie. You must hear this. For the good of your soul you must hear this."

As if to make sure of his victim, Walker laid a large hand upon Robin's shoulder, and launched upon the lampoon in the tones of a High Church curate. It was a clever thing, as many such things are, If it had been merely a "dirty song and dreary," Robin might have grinned it out ; but the parody made him feel that he would never like to read John Blundell's poem again. Walker's audience sniggered willy-nilly. Robin looked white and sick.

"Well, what does Peter Pan think of it ?" asked Walker Major, tightening his hold on Robin's shoulder, and waving the parody in front of his nose.

For answer, Robin snatched at the paper, crumpled it into a ball, and threw it into the fire.

"That's what I think of it," he said, the colour rushing back into his face.

There followed a fine dramatic pause. Walker regarded him dispassionately.

"No, you ought to be called Eric," he drawled ; "Eric, or Little by Little. Wasn't it Eric who did that sort of thing ? Any-

way, it was somebody who's out of print now."

The dinner-bell rang.

"After footer you'll recite my little poem, Strangeways. It will do you no end of good to recite my poem."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE KNIGHT CLIMBS A WINDOW

ROBIN limped home that evening after his ordeal. His mother met him at the door.

"Robin, my dear child!"

"It's all right, mummy. It's the footer, you know. It was a bit of a dust-up, to-day."

"Robin, what is it?"

"Don't be a fuss-pot, mum. I'm all right."

"Fuss-pot or no fuss-pot, you're going to bed, and I'm going to send for Dr. Chalmers."

"Right-oh, mummy. Anything for a quiet life."

Dr. Chalmers came and went.

"He's quite all right," he said. "Nothing broken. Someone seems to have collared him rather strenuously. I think I'd take him off the football for a bit."

"It's so hard to know," said Mrs. Strangeways. "Another doctor said that football was just what he wanted."

"I know," said Dr. Chalmers. "I should have said so, too, but I'm inclined to change my mind. My honest opinion is that he's fretting about something. Get him to talk when he's had a good sleep."

Mrs. Strangeways lay awake through the

greater part of the night, listening for any untoward sound from Robin's room. Once she stole to his door for a peep. He appeared to be sleeping peacefully. "Little stranger," she said to herself; and went back to her room. Towards dawn she dozed, so did not hear the ring of hoofs down Mitre Lane. Very nimbly the Knight scaled the wall by the lead piping. He hardly stirred the wisteria as he let himself into Robin's room.

"That was well done, Robin lad. Well and kindly done."

Robin started up. By the grey light he could see his dressing-table and cupboard, and the little heap of clothes on the chair beside him. He could see nothing that was unfamiliar.

"Oh, sire," he whispered.

It seemed that a firm, cool hand pushed the hair back from his forehead.

"I saddled the mare at peep of day. We make Mallow Ford before noon. As I would fain thank thee, needs must that we turn aside."

"It was funny," Robin whispered, "He seemed to get fed-up all of a sudden. I think he was scared. Perhaps he felt the chaps were afraid I'd tell. He hardly hurt me at all. There's nothing to thank me for. I just couldn't do it."

"Natheless I have come," said the voice.

"I think I knew you would come. I heard you singing once, and once you laughed out-

side Mr. Goodeve's. I just happened to be there—but now you have come to me. I thought you would. I wanted you so. Sire, when will you let me see you ? "

" Ah, when, Robin lad ? " replied the voice. " So thou heardst me laugh."

Robin seemed to feel his bed shake. The Knight was convulsed with silent mirth.

" What are you laughing at, Knight ? " asked Robin.

" So I am to take tea with thee at Mistress St. Clair's ? " spake the voice. " Well, who laughs last laughs loudest."

" You laughed loudest, Knight," said Robin.

" Aye, that I did," said the Knight. " Wilt come with me to Mistress St. Clair's ? "

" Oh, Knight, would you come ? "

" I could and I would," replied the voice with a laugh. Then it suddenly saddened. " Better not."

" Oh, why not ? " asked Robin. " Be bountiful, and tarry, Knight ! "

" Thou holdest me hard," said the voice ; " as did he who wrote those lines. Nay, nay, lad. I may not tarry. Yet could not but laugh. The bookseller did but jest in part."

" Has Mr. Goodeve seen you then, sire ? "

" Long ago," said the Knight.

" Oh," said Robin ; " how you long to tarry. Stay with us. Stay with us."

He flung out his arms as if to hold him, but the Knight seemed to leap back.

" Nay, nay," he said.

There came the beating of a horse's hoofs upon the cobbles below the window.

"The mare grows festive," said the Knight. "I must needs sell her when I tarry."

"When you tarry?" said Robin. "Then you will stay some day? I know you will stay?"

"Methinks not," said the Knight wistfully. "Farewell!"

"Knight," said Robin, "you want to stay. I know you want to stay. I'll make it right for you to stay."

"Thou!" said the Knight. "Ah, mannikin, that will not be easy."

Robin heard him humming a little tune. Then the wisteria was brushed aside.

"Farewell, Robin!"

Robin sat up and listened. Presently he heard the whinny of a horse. Then the cobbles rang to the mare's hoofs.

He was alone with the growing dawn.

## CHAPTER VII

### GRANNY MALONEY

ROBIN did not go to school on the morning following the Knight's visit. The Dean decided upon a morning of self-indulgence. He would set his kodak snapshots in order, and Robin should assist him. Space was ruthlessly made on the crowded study-table, and Robin set to work with paste-brush and roller. It was a delightful occupation, for, like the advertisement for backache pills, every picture told a story. Perhaps it should be said that every picture set Robin and the Dean talking of old times. There were snapshots of Mrs. Strangeways in unconsciously Amazonian attitudes; Mrs. Strangeways serving at tennis; Mrs. Strangeways clinging to the collar of a great staghound.

"Devon," said the Dean, as he handed Robin the latter snap.

"Uncle Tom Cobleigh," said Robin.

"More Devon," said the Dean. "Not your Devon this time. You were at Gran's with your mother. I was relieving Bickerstaff. Those are the Foundlings, Robin."

Robin looked at a group of young men in flannels.

"They don't look like orphans," said Robin.

"Charming fellows," said the Dean; "charming fellows. Took me to their hearts at once. Made me one of them in a short week-end. Hallo. Here's Spender going in to bat at Lord's, My word. That was a warm day. Let me see; was the boy with me?"

"Of course I was. Don't you remember the ice-brick?"

"Ah, yes, yes," said the Dean.

It would be hard to say how the story of the parody came out that morning. The Dean seemed to get at it as he got his runs when he played cricket. He had just pieced the story together when a note arrived by hand. It was Robin's invitation to tea from Mrs. St. Clair.

It would seem that Robin was likely to qualify himself for the rôle of first walking curate, for on Friday he took tea with Mrs. St. Clair, and on the following Saturday he visited Granny Maloney; a feat compassed by no curate in the history of Lushmount Parish. Little need be said of Mrs. St. Clair's five o'clock. Robin balanced the blue Worcester cup and saucer successfully on his knee, and wondered how it was possible to get so many breakable things into one room, and to keep them there.

He silently approved Mrs. St. Clair's dimity curtains, and wondered at Mrs. St. Clair's tea-gown. Robin had never seen a tea-gown before. It must be remembered that he was one of the Georgians.

His hostess in her vague way was feeling

after that moment when she and Robin and Mr. Goodeve had stood abashed outside the bookseller's shop, and the world had grown suddenly young. She was also tasting the savour of something unusual. It was unusual to be entertaining a little boy as if he were a curate. She liked the way her cretonne chair-cover shewed up the blue lights in Robin's black hair; and restrained a not unnatural impulse to stroke it. Conversation, however, was sporadic. It was a rare inspiration of Mrs. St. Clair's to produce John Blundell's Russet Book. The Russet Book was the edition de luxe of the poet's works. It was illustrated in colour. Robin and Mrs. St. Clair bent over it together, while the people passed up and down in the fog and the gathering darkness outside; and the lamplighter came and went. Of course, the artist had limned the Knight. There were ladies, too, in wonderful headdresses. There was one etching of the Cathedral tower, seen from a distance. You looked down through a wooded slope upon Lushdale—a little Lushdale that Robin might not have recognized, had it not been for the Cathedral. There was a picture in delicate colours of the Resting Angel awaking from sleep set opposite one of Blundell's favourite poems. The artist had very cleverly preserved the semblance of the figure on the inn signboard; while at the same time conveying a sense of wonder and transfiguration.

Robin and Mrs. St. Clair bent together over

John Blundell's dream world, lit by the sanguine rays of Mrs. St. Clair's standard lamp. They read the verses in turn. Robin forgot to be shy. He droned John Blundell's music happily.

A cuckoo clock struck six.

"Holy Moses!" said Robin. "What will mummy say? I was to be sure and not stay too long."

"You haven't outstayed your welcome," said Mrs. St. Clair, "but perhaps your mamma will be getting anxious."

She showed him to the door.

"Well, I think that was quite a success," she said.

Then she swooped down and pecked the top of Robin's head.

"You didn't bring the Knight," she said. The little joke was evidently meant to cover up the peck.

"I'll bring him next time," said Robin.

On his way home he pondered over the Knight's words.

"There's many a true word spoken in jest."

Now I must speak of his visit to Granny Maloney.

No one stayed at Lushdale for any time without hearing of Granny Maloney; for no one could catch sight of her green cloak and poke bonnet, and the great yellow-crested cockatoo perched on the dashboard of her governess-cart, without asking of the nearest native, "Who is she?"

Likely as not, the answer would come, shouted more or less tunefully by some passing school-child or errand-boy :

> " Rich Granny Maloney,
> Give her some oats for her pony."

This was the chant that followed her piebald steed wherever he took her. One would have thought that the young of Lushdale would have wearied of this catch ; but Lushdale was a conservative town, and cherished her legends, both ancient and modern. Granny Maloney might have missed the couplet herself, despite the scriptural maledictions with which she returned the greeting, in a voice as harsh as a corncrake.

She lived at Flint House, on the borders of Lushmount Parish. Her dwelling looked out upon the high road by which one comes from Stipton and the sea. In the days of John Fleming, Lushmount was for the most part a forest ; but all that remains to-day of the woods through which the Knight must have sought a track is a plantation of pines, standing where the road suddenly turns on its last downward stage to the eastern coast. The spot where the pines stood guard was known as Lushdale Bend—for there one caught one's first sight of the Cathedral tower, as one came up from the little seaside town of Stipton. A quarter of a mile further on Flint House would be passed. Then began the descent into Lush-

dale. Lushmount was, as it were, the tallest of those earthen billows, in the trough of which lay Robin's great stone ship, the Cathedral.

Flint House stood alone by the roadside; square and grey, with niggardly windows, and an oaken front door, nailstudded, and of a massiveness out of all proportion to the size of the dwelling. A stone stable and outhouses cowered in the rear; and three poplars stood on either flank. If Granny Maloney were at home, the wayfarer, pausing in the shade of these poplars to rest his eyes on the Cathedral below him, would be interrupted in his reverie by a shrill voice from the upper window of Flint House: "What d'ye want? What d'ye want?"

The cockatoo fired this question at all who presumed to linger about Flint House. Granny Maloney had no need of a watchdog. There were some in Lushdale who believed the old lady to be a witch; but Miss Prendergarst and the people who mattered, put her down as an eccentric spinster with money.

Miss Prendergarst continued to feel that something ought to be done about Granny Maloney, long after she had sustained a final rebuff in her efforts to stimulate the old person's social sense. What could be done? Granny Maloney did not break the law; and she lived within her means. There could be no doubt on that point. Had not Miss Prendergarst herself learned off Mr. Albertson, the baker, that his man had been paid at the door

of Flint House out of a stockingful of sovereigns?

The legend of Granny Maloney's hidden riches grew at every recital; but Flint House continued, with blistered woodwork and an upper window broken. Its neighbour was protected by a wooden shutter. Silently indeed would Flint House have stood, had it not been for the cockatoo; for Granny Maloney had but one retainer, who had spoken no word from the day of his birth. He was a little, sallow wisp of a man; hardly a man at all. He had the eyes of a deaf mute, blue and almost painfully bright. He was butler, cook, gardener, and sculleryman at Flint House; but before all these, he was groom. He tended the piebald pony with a devotion that was more proper to a Derby favourite. It was quite clear that, wherever the oats came from, Granny Maloney's courser had his fill of them; and though his mistress may have lacked a new gown, the pony's coat always had a satin sheen upon it.

Nathaniel Bird's folk had worked with horses for many generations. It was his father who looked to the stabling at the Resting Angel; and was found grooming an invisible mare on more than one occasion. Mr Penfold, the proprietor of that ancient hostelry, did not interfere with old Tom Bird when he had this mood upon him. He found that ladies and gentlemen of adventurous and enquiring minds came with cameras and notebooks to interview this

hostler. This, of course, was good for trade; as they usually stayed for lunch, and brought their friends to the Resting Angel. There were some who maintained that a deaf mute had been born to Tom Bird as a judgment on him for his presumption; but Miss Prendergarst and the people who really mattered, held that little Nat's affliction was due to the inherent stupidity of working-class mothers, and the lack of a district nurse. What Nat thought about it, he never divulged.

Some dozen years before Robin's appearance in Lushdale, Granny Maloney had arrived as a guest at the Resting Angel. She had remained there a week; and when she left, Nat had followed her, with the consent of his parents. Mr. St. Clair had received instructions to sell the property, for the freehold of which the old lady had paid him. Her manner of payment is one of the many secrets locked in the breast of Mr. St. Clair—whose probity and discretion all Lushdale would vouch for. There are some who maintain that Granny Maloney entered the solicitor's office with something wrapped up in a red flannel petticoat, though Miss Prendergarst, with her well-known dislike of vain superstitions, scouted the idea that the red-covered mystery had anything to do with the purchase of Flint House. It was quite obvious to her that Granny Maloney's treasure was a hot water bottle. This was a feasible explanation, as there was ice in all the ewers of Lushdale on

the morning of the purchase. Be that as it may, there was Miss Mary Maloney (for so her name was written in the deed of sale) lawfully domiciled at Flint House with her silent henchman, and her garrulous cockatoo; and Flint House was as ignorant of her whence and her whither as was the case with any migrant perched for a moment to rest his wings on a buttress of the Cathedral. No one was ever invited to Flint House; and the uninvited who knocked were seldom vouchsafed more than a passing glimpse of what lay behind the oaken door. In the early days of her occupation, a pantechnicon had laboured up to Lushmount from Lushdale, and stayed at her door; but how the pantechnicon came to Lushdale nobody could say.

It will be agreed that Robin's visit needs some explanation. It would never have taken place, had it not been for the cockatoo. To work further back in the direction of the first cause, perhaps I should give Mr. Little's motor-cycle the credit for Robin's obtaining an entrée. Perhaps Mr. Little himself should be thanked. But if we work back any further, we shall become involved in Mr. Little's forbears, and we shall then find ourselves in the grip of the Darwinian Theory. Let it simply be told how Robin, Mr. Little, Granny Maloney, Nat Bird and the cockatoo met under the pines on the road from Stipton; Robin on his legs, Mr. Little on his motor-cycle, and the rest in the governess-cart. You may have gathered from

something that Miss Prendergarst let fall, that Mr. Little was impatient of a jog-trot theory of life. On that Saturday afternoon, as he approached Lushdale Bend from the direction of Stipton, it seemed that the governess-cart threatened to deprive him of a very natural desire to round the bend at a becoming speed. He blew a blast so searching that the piebald pony almost broke the traces in its frenzy to be elsewhere, and made off towards Lushdale at a gallop. His mistress was jerked out upon the road, Nat clung to the reins, and the cockatoo with an outraged scream spread his wings and flew to the top of a pine tree. Nat brought the pony to a standstill a few hundred yards down the road, and turned his head towards the spot where Mr. Little was penitently removing dust from the green cloak. Granny Maloney having been restored to her chariot, and the pony pacified, it only remained for the cockatoo to alight upon the dashboard like a dove of peace. That self-regarding bird, however, remained speechless with indignation on the tree-top, unmoved by suggestions, threats or blandishments from below. Mr. Little, after some lively pantomime—which only seemed to fortify the cockatoo's decision to remain—pleaded an urgent engagement, and restarting his engine, spluttered and banged himself out of the embroglio. At this the pony was overtaken by a violent ague ; and Granny Maloney, torn between concern for her steed in the shafts and her watchman on the pine-

crest, let fall a torrent of scriptural abuse on Nat, who smiled back woodenly from his place at the pony's head.

"You may grin," screamed Granny Maloney; "yea, grin like a dog, and run about the city."

It was here that Robin saw his chance for a deed of errantry. He had come upon the scene in jersey and shorts: a straggler from a pack of human hounds gone away in the direction of Mallow Ford. Climbing was always more to Robin's taste than cross-country running; and in a little while he was well up the pine-tree, encouraged from below by quotations from the psalms and the prophets, and led from above by the cockatoo's repeated slogan: "What d'ye want? What d'ye want?"

"I want you," said Robin, with his hands and knees gritty with resin, and his face swept by the soughing pine-needles.

The cockatoo seemed impressed, for he took to a lower branch, and then to a lower branch again. Finally he accompanied Robin to the lowest branch of all, where he remained perched on his shoulder. Robin leapt to the ground like a young falconer. There the little group remained for a moment in the gloom of the pines: Granny Maloney gesticulating and crying like a prophetess; little Nat in his old-fashioned tiger's livery, standing at the pony's head with his gnome's face, and his dumb smile; and Robin in soiled white shorts and

blue jersey, with the white and yellow bird upon his shoulder.

"Thou sparrow on the housetop! Thou pelican in the wilderness!" screamed Granny Maloney.

Robin endeavoured to lift the cockatoo from his shoulder, but the bird clung tenaciously to the jersey.

"What d'ye want? What d'ye want?" he screamed.

"The ass knoweth his master's crib," said the old lady. "Turn in, turn in, my lord."

She made a gesture towards the governess-cart.

Robin began to wish he had not been quite so knightly.

"He'll come to you, won't he?" he said.

Granny Maloney made as if to retrieve the bird; but the talons took a fresh grip.

Robin realized that he must either get into the governess-cart or risk the shedding of blood and the scattering of feathers. The nursemaids of Lushdale threatened naughty children with Granny Maloney's cart:

> "I'll send for Granny Maloney,
> With her cart and her cloak and her pony."

So ran the threat. . . .

"Turn in, turn in, my lord."

Robin made the best of a bad business, and took his place by Nat. The latter gave the

reins a shake, and they started off for Flint House.

"Clip clop! Clip clop! Better not! Better not!"

This seemed to be the chanty of the little hoofs on the macadam road. The cockatoo, still with a tenacious hold on Robin's jersey, took up the refrain:

"Better not! Better not!"

"Aye! Better not! Better not!" Granny Maloney chanted.

Robin began to feel overpowered by all this reiteration of Mr. Punch's advice to those about to marry.

"Better not what?" he cried. "Why do you all say 'Better not?'"

"It is the driving of Jehu," said Granny Maloney, turning her head towards Nat. "He driveth furiously."

"Clip clop! Clip clop! Better not! Better not!" said the pony's hoofs.

They pulled up at Flint House, the cockatoo still clinging to Robin's shoulder.

"Turn in, my lord."

With an odd premonition that this adventure was going to lead to something that might stand him in stead when next he met the Knight, Robin turned in.

He had heard many tales of what he should find if ever he were to pass the oaken door of Flint House. Some said that he would find sacks of gold, and human skulls; but these were for the most part unimaginative members

of the Choir School, to whom anything in the way of a mystery took the form of gold and skulls.

There were more ingenious theories than this, some of them quite pretty, woven by little girls, with the help of Hans Andersen and Grimm, and many that were far from pretty.

What Robin actually did find was a parlour such as one might have come upon if one had been seeking cheap seaside lodgings in the reign of Queen Victoria. There was a horse-hair sofa, and there were antimacassars, and a little piano of mottled rosewood with a front of frayed red silk and fretwork. It only appeared that some one had taken away the pictures.

To Robin's immense relief, the cockatoo hopped from his shoulder on to the piano.

"Well, that's all right," he said.

Granny Maloney was making signs through the window to Nat, who put the reins of the cart through an iron ring on the nearest poplar.

"She brought him butter in a lordly dish," she said, turning upon Robin.

In an incredibly short time Nat appeared with a brass tray. On the tray was a decanter, two little glasses, and a plate of pink biscuits.

"Take a little wine for thy stomach's sake," said Granny Maloney. She filled up one of the little glasses with red cordial from the decanter, and offered it to Robin.

He hesitated.

Granny Maloney set it down on an occasional table with a bitter little laugh.

In a moment all Robin's superstitious fears of her vanished. He was swept with a wave of compassion. Up till then Granny Maloney had seemed all nose and bonnet and cloak. Now, for the first time, he was aware of her eyes.

"Oh, now I know why there are no pictures," he said. "You're always looking out of the window, and you don't need them."

"It's good to see him riding by," said Granny Maloney, and her voice was low and sweet.

Robin started at the change. This, then, was what Granny Maloney hid in Flint House: a second self, a lady who watched at her window for her knight to pass.

"Be pitiful, and tarry, Knight!" she murmured.

"Better not!" screamed the cockatoo.

Granny Maloney laughed, a crackling witch's laugh.

"Aye! Better not," she repeated in that old scrannel-pipe of a voice, with which she was wont to urge the pony, and answer the chant of the Lushdale children.

"Oh, no, no, no!" Robin pleaded. "If only he would stay, we wouldn't be afraid to be happy."

> "If he'd part with his mare,
> I've the price, and to spare;
> And she'd not lack for oats or for grooming."

Granny Maloney set the words to a little tune which Robin seemed to remember. Yes. It was the tune the Knight had hummed just before he took his leave, and pushed aside the wisteria.

Granny Maloney drummed with her fingers on the window-pane.

" He'd not lack for oats or for grooming."

The cockatoo screamed.

The gaunt figure turned from the window.

" Aye, cocky.

> ' Rich Mary Maloney,
> Give her some oats for her pony.'

Good cocky. Wise cocky. Better so."

She went to the parlour door, and held it open. Robin took the hint.

As he passed, he felt her stoop and peck the top of his head as Mrs. St. Clair had done.

The lights of Lushdale began to twinkle as he made his way homewards. He shivered as he ran. How beautiful the old town looked in the gathering dusk! It seemed that the grey Cathedral stood in its midst, silently appealing to the sky for some assurance of peace and permanence; some justification for all the hope that had gone to the building of Lushdale, the rearing of its generations, and the maintenance of that reassuring chime. Robin thought of the Knight abroad in the wood above Lushdale hundreds of years ago. It was a different Lushdale then; and yet in

something that was essential, Lushdale had not changed. For the Knight still loved his city, still passed through its streets, longing to tarry, and yet fearful that if he were to linger the happiness that he both gave and received might suffer tarnishment.

Then Robin's mind darted back to the scene he had just left. He thought of poor old Granny Maloney, and the little song she had sung in that low sweet voice. Granny Maloney was in two minds about the Knight. She saved her gold to buy his mare, and laughed herself to scorn for doing so. Who would have thought that Granny Maloney was play-acting all the while she drove through Lushdale, and the children called after her; that she was hiding from the world what she almost succeeded in hiding from herself: that wistful spirit waiting on the day when the Knight should dare to tarry?

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE DEAN ON VOICES

WHATEVER distinction Robin may have gained by his visit to Flint House, the immediate results were not happy.

The run home did not shake off the chill Robin had felt as he left Granny Maloney's, and at his arrival at the Deanery, his mother packed him off to bed, reserving scolding and counter-explanation till the morning.

On the Sunday, however, Robin's temperature was up.

Mrs. Strangeways had no thought but that of warding off the old enemy, pneumonia.

In his feverish sleep Robin murmured continually of the Knight. Mrs. Strangeways, with a somewhat uncomfortable sense of eavesdropping, pieced together the story of Walker Major's lampoon, even as the Dean had done.

"I sometimes wonder," she said to her husband one evening when Robin was on the mend, "whether it is altogether wise to let such a boy loose in a place like Lushdale."

"What boy have they been letting loose?"

asked the Dean, looking up from his *Hibbert Journal.*

"I was thinking of Robin," said Mrs. Strangeways. "He's been talking so much of the Knight."

"Ah," said the Dean. "Um."

"I don't think it's quite healthy," said Mrs. Strangeways.

"My dear Joan!" said the Dean. "What harm can the old fellow do him?"

"I would hardly have described the Knight as 'an old fellow.' If ever a voice had the ring of youth in it——"

Dr. Strangeways regarded his wife with that expression of his which always made him appear like an inquiring child.

"Joan," he said, "have you been hearing voices too? Is hearing voices a habit with you, Joan?"

"I've been having some late nights while Robin's been seedy," Mrs. Strangeways replied. "One thinks one hears things."

"There's no call for you to explain the voices away," said the Dean. "I heard them too."

"You?" said Mrs. Strangeways.

"Perhaps it would be more exact to say that I heard *It.*"

The Dean rose, and warmed his apron before the fire.

Mrs. Strangeways regarded her husband's reflection in the mirrored overmantel. She could not recall ever having so regarded

him before. There seemed to be something puckish about the lumpy, clean-shaven face; something that had escaped her until that moment.

"You don't mean to tell me," said Mrs. Strangeways, in pained bewilderment, "that you believe in the Knight?"

"Why not?" said the Dean. "You know I am not what they call a 'safe' man."

"Oh, do be sensible," said Mrs. Strangeways.

"I've promised Robin to give the Knight a place in the Cathedral Choir if he will consent to tarry," Dr. Strangeways continued. Then he gave one of those famous little wheezing laughs, which always served as a relish to his stories at clerical parties.

"I don't think that Robin's infatuation is a laughing matter," said Mrs. Strangeways.

"I wasn't thinking of Robin," said the Dean. "I was wondering how Miss Prendergarst would react if the Knight were to take lodgings at Lushdale."

Mrs. Strangeways turned to the door.

"Where are you going, dearest?" inquired the Dean.

"I'm going to get a thermometer," said Mrs. Strangeways. "I don't think you can be well."

The Dean watched her go. Then he seized an old wide-awake, and accomplished a graceful exit by way of the window.

Mrs. Strangeways did not elect to follow him with the thermometer, though she knew that she could run him to earth at the back of Mr. Goodeve's shop. The Dean always donned that wide-awake when he went hunting the German critics at Mr. Goodeve's.

## CHAPTER IX

### GREETING IN THE MARKET-PLACE.

ROBIN came down from his sick-bed a few days after that memorable bolt of the Dean's.

Dr. Chalmers prescribed beef-tea and gentle walks.

The ride to Mallow Ford was prescribed by the Knight. This is how it came about.

On the Thursday, Robin stepped out into the winter morning sunlight with a thrill of happiness. It seemed that he had discovered the sun for the first time. To Robin, with his strength flowing back to him, as it will to the young, all Lushdale seemed as bright as a picture painted yesterday. It was almost as quiet as a picture, too, for the children were all at school ; and in the neighbourhood of the Close people went about their business as if the unwonted sunlight had set them upon some Celestial errand demanding silence.

Even Mr. Albertson's motor-van seemed to have joined in the conspiracy as it purred past Robin, exhaling a pleasing odour of new bread.

As he turned into the market-place, Robin was aware of something out of the ordinary. Preparations for the market that afternoon were going forward, but the sunshine seemed

to have cast a spell over the rough booths and market-carts, so that it seemed the market-people were engaged upon something more in the nature of a rite. A dozen or so of sleek pigeons were basking in the lee of crates and barrels; and the women, as they flitted about from booth to booth, seemed to have caught something of their easy movements and soft talk. Nobody wrangled. It was too pleasant a morning. A big country lad was singing as he unloaded sacks from a decrepit-looking cart; and old Mr. Greenwood positively whistled as he set out his tatterdemalion array of books upon his barrow. Robin was just turning his steps towards the booths with a boy's instinct to see what there was to be seen—when the sound of horse's hoofs behind him caused him to wheel round. He half expected abuse for mooning about, and getting in the way; but there came instead a laugh which he recognised at once: a laugh that seemed to be shaken out into the sunlight like a standard.

"Greeting, Robin lad!" said the Knight. "Greeting in the market-place."

"Sire!" said Robin. And he put up his hand to catch at the invisible bridle.

An old woman, who had just set down a basket of eggs on one of the booths, wondered what the young gentleman in the trencher was after adoin' of.

"Thou hast a heavy rheum on thee," said the Knight, "and a fever to boot."

"It was nothing much, Knight."

"Nay, nay! Thou art in need of the hill air. Ride on my mare to Mallow Ford, wilt thou?"

"Ride on your mare!" said Robin. "Oh, sire!"

"Come!" said the Knight.

"How can I come?" asked Robin, with a little flutter of a laugh. "Oh, oh, Knight! I'd love to come, but how?"

He heard the clink of steel on the cobbles. An arm was put about him, and he was lifted into the air.

The old woman by the booth had turned to count her eggs.

## CHAPTER X

### THERE AND BACK IN NO TIME

ROBIN was aware of a blinding flash of sunlight. It did not appear to him that he had any limbs at all for a time. Then he was conscious of trying to adapt his short legs to the great saddle. Next, he knew that he grasped a handful of the mare's mane. Then the mare's head became gradually defined; and after that he caught sight of the Knight's plume bobbing away to his right. Then came the Knight's hand that governed the gemmed bridle; then the other hand that held the plumed helmet. Then the rest of the Knight appeared quite suddenly.

He led the mare through long, feathery grass. Robin could hear the swish of his greaves as he cut a way. His two feet went like two steel-clad prows through a summer sea. There was a doggedness in his stride.

"Sire," said Robin.

The Knight turned his head, and smiled.

"Yonder," he said, pointing a mail-clad arm, "is Mallow Ford."

Robin followed his direction. At the crest of the grassy slope they were mounting stood

a clump of willows. Beyond that the land dipped, and beyond that again there was forest.

The Knight began to sing of Mallow Ford. It was not exactly a song of praise, such as he had sung of the Mallow flowing under the three town bridges. There was regret in this song.

> "I needs must pass by Mallow Ford.
> Gloria Patri, Filioque Gloria."

So his song began. Then he went on to sing of the birds that tarried not by Mallow Ford, of the deer that tarried not, though the sedge-grass was sweet. He sang of his mission, which was to pass and pass, and be not awearied, even as Mallow River passed unwearied through Lushdale to the sea: for as Mallow River passed ever seaward, so must he pass ever skyward.

Gone was the bridge of Lushmount quarry stone, over which Robin had so often watched the shrieking engines pass with their line of captive coaches. Gone was the lanky signal-mast. Gone were the brick cottages, gone the cinder-track, and the dynamo-shed that served the Mallow Potteries half a mile away. Mallow Ford was as quiet and untouched as it had been when John Fleming was alive. Three great oaks almost filled the site of Dimsdale's tannery. Beyond that was thick forest.

The Knight lifted Robin from the saddle

when they reached the willows, and turned him about.

Immediately in front of them was the open grass slope. Then the wood began. Down in the hollow Robin could see the familiar tower. He could catch the glint of Mallow River as it took a turn seaward. The electric power-station should have been there. Lushdale had drawn in closer about the Cathedral. It was smaller. He could make out the corn exchange, and John Fleming's alms-houses. There was the museum. At least, it was the museum with a different roof. That must be John Fleming's house before it became the museum. There, too, was the old part of the Resting Angel: the part that the visitors went to see.

Robin recalled the picture he had seen in John Blundell's Russet Book. It was old Lushdale: the Knight's Lushdale.

"That will cure thee of thy fever, Robin lad."

Robin looked up at the Knight. He was stretching out an arm towards Lushdale, as if in blessing.

"It's prettier than my Lushdale," Robin whispered.

"Nay, nay," said the Knight.

"Oh, sire, how you must have longed to stay!" said Robin.

"Come," said the Knight; and again Robin felt the arm about him.

There was a blinding flash of sunlight. His

feet clattered upon the cobbles of the market-place.

The old woman looked up from her basket of eggs, and wondered what the young gentleman was up to now.

## CHAPTER XI

### MR. LITTLE CONCEIVES A PAGEANT

IT was at Mr. Little's instigation that the Mayor of Lushdale had convened a meeting to consider the advisability of holding a Lushdale pageant. Mr. Little was very happy in his opening remarks when he was called upon to speak in favour of the scheme.

"Your Worship," he began, "I trust that you will succeed where your illustrious predecessor failed. I trust that you will be able to persuade the Knight to tarry with us at least for six evenings and two matinees. . . ." (Laughter and applause—except in the case of Miss Prendergarst, who had come to the meeting with some idea that she might be able to quash the pageant.) Mr. Little proceeded to flatter the Mayor, who responded to the treatment with a heady speech.

"I yield to no man in my love for my native town," said Mr. Cuthbertson, "and I hope I am not a jealous lover." (Cries of 'No, no' from his supporters on the Town Council.) "This is an age of advertisement, and Lushdale cannot be hidden under a bushel. I want to share Lushdale with our cousins across the Atlantic and our sisters and brothers

from the uttermost ends of our far-flung Empire. I want them to feel that here, in this city of dreaming spires——" (A voice: "And lost causes."—Another voice: "Yes! How about our tramway extension?" Uproar eventually quelled.) "Here in this city of dreaming towers," the Mayor corrected himself, "they may come to a knowledge of their heritage."

We need not proceed further with the Mayor's speech. It is enough to say that it carried the day against all the Miss Prendergarsts.

Lushdale divided itself into committees and sub-committees; and stitched and squabbled and marched up and down the cricket-ground in the lengthening twilight, obedient to Mr. Little's megaphone.

The musical committee complained of the dilatoriness of the historical committee. The costumes committee complained of the dilatoriness of the casting committee and the finance committee; and all the committees joined in complaining of headquarters.

"I told you so," said Miss Prendergarst. "A pageant is always apt to bring out that element of commonness in people. In Mr. Little's hands the thing will be a blasphemy."

Mr. Little began to lose flesh, and betrayed a tendency to doze in the Fourth Form room.

"Poor Mr. Little is looking positively

emaciated," said Mrs. St. Clair. "There's something rather fine about that man that seems to come out in adversity. I confess I never was very fond of Mr. Little."

"Haven't you heard?" said Miss Tomlinson.

They had met on one of their diurnal walks across the Close.

"Heard?"

"Mr. Little's Knight has slipped him up."

"Slipped him up?"

"Yes; let him down. Mr. Albertson has got the wind up. I'm quoting Mr. Little."

"Well, I never could see Mr. Albertson's alleged likeness to the Knight," said Mrs. St. Clair.

"It's so awkward his being clean-shaven," said Miss Tomlinson. "The Knight, I mean. Why didn't he have a beard, like Don Quixote? Now, if only Mr. Goodeve were not lame; Mr. Goodeve with a beard——"

"Oh, don't," said Mrs. St. Clair.

"Do you know what Smithson's are charging me for my ruff?" went on Miss Tomlinson, who had been cast for the part of one of Queen Elizabeth's ladies. The virgin queen was supposed to have eaten capon at the Deanery, and afterwards to have threatened a bishop with unfrocking.

Mrs. Strangeways held sewing-bees. Miss Tomlinson came and steeped herself in the atmosphere of the room where Gloriana had tarried.

"I wish you would lend me your hair," she said to Mrs. Strangeways. "I can't get a red wig that will do her justice."

The Dean complained of partisans in the umbrella stand, and a pile of jerkins on the chair in the hall where he always liked to put on his boots.

"I think you call it partisans," he said. "Or is it claymores? Some deadly weapon."

"They're only wood and tinfoil," said Mrs. Strangeways.

"It's the principle of the thing," said the Dean. "I'm a man of peace. What a pity Boadicea never came to Lushdale! How would the boy like to see his mother leading a forlorn hope against the Romans?"

"Mummy's going to be Mr. Cuthbertson's wife," said Robin.

"Yes," said Mrs. Strangeways. "Some one has found out that Mistress Fleming was a six-footer."

As for Robin, he had the choice of many parts: a Georgian pot-boy, an Elizabethan page, an acolyte, a drummer with the Mallowshires on their way to Waterloo, or one of the merrie scholars. He chose the latter without hesitation.

The merrie scholars appeared in Episode Four. Episode Four was Mr. Little's Benjamin in his family of episodes.

When Miss Prendergarst heard of his intention to drag the Knight into a tableau all to himself, she sniffed.

"Fools step in where angels fear to tread," she said.

"Isn't it 'rush in'?" said Miss Tomlinson.

They had met on that side of Mr. Goodeve's innermost shelf where dwelt the German critics.

"I prefer 'step in,'" said Miss Prendergarst. "'Step in' conveys my meaning better."

Mr. Little heard her. He was running his finger along the books of travel on the other side of the shelf. He had spent four sleepless nights. The pageant was getting on his nerves. He walked out of the shop with a set face. He would bring off Episode Four if it cost him his soul.

As he reached the pavement, Granny Maloney passed in her governess-cart. It was a Saturday morning, and the children were all abroad.

> "Rich Granny Maloney,
> Give her some oats for her pony."

Mr. Little marched on. He fancied he could hear the children cry: "Poor Jumbo Little stepped in where angels feared to tread." Mr. Little dodged into King Street.

"Good morning, sir."

"Hallo, Strangeways."

Mr. Little's heart warmed towards Robin as it probably would have warmed towards a nice dog, had one come up and licked his hand at that moment. He had no great

opinion of Robin. He liked boys who were live wires. But just then he felt weary of the time-honoured vendetta between dominie and pupil. He wanted something still. Robin was still. Mr. Little had gone so far as to call him a "bromide."

"Hallo, Strangeways. Whither away?"

"I don't know exactly, sir," said Robin truthfully. "I've just had my hair cut."

"Come for a walk," said Mr. Little. "It will act like a dry shampoo."

They passed through Lushdale, and came upon the towing-path that runs beside the Mallow. Mr. Little talked. It was a relief to him to talk. He would have talked to himself, if he had not met Robin.

"I've set my heart on bringing off this pageant, and, by Gad! I've put my shirt on Episode Four. Oh, these Cathedral spinsters!

> 'She is not old, she is not young,
> The woman with the serpent's tongue.'

You don't know those lines of William Watson, Strangeways. They're not in our anthology. Oh, how I loathe this cant about good breeding and English reticence! If a thing's beautiful it ought to be brought out into the sunlight and shown. The story of the Knight is a beautiful thing. The people are entitled to their legends. Why shouldn't I put it over to them? I'm not breaking a butterfly on a wheel. I'll treat it reverently; I'm not a

Philistine. What do you think about it, Strangeways?"

"I think he'd like you to, sir."

"What's that you say? Who'd like me to? Oh, I have you! The Knight. Well, it would be nice to know, wouldn't it, Strangeways? If I were to meet the Knight at this moment."

"Ha, ha!"

"Oh, you may laugh, Strangeways."

"Please, sir, I wasn't laughing."

"I beg your pardon. I thought I heard somebody laughing. I suppose this pageant is getting on my nerves, Do you know, Strangeways, I thought I heard the children laughing at me just now."

"They were laughing at Granny Maloney, sir," said Robin.

"By Jove!" said Mr. Little. "I never knew what loneliness could be until I went into this. There's no one you can trust—no one. Oh, what wouldn't I give for a man who wouldn't let me down—a man who would understand."

Mr. Little outpaced the Dean in his frenzy. Robin fairly skipped by his side.

"Heavens!" said Mr. Little presently. "It's nearly twelve o'clock, and I've been putting miles between me and lunch."

They turned right about, and marched into Lushdale.

On the homeward way, Mr. Little delivered a lecture on drama for villages.

"Well, *au révoir*, Strangeways," he said when they reached the market-place. "I've enjoyed our little talk."

Robin smiled and saluted, and turned to run home.

"Stay, Robin!"

He turned in the direction of Mr. Little. The Fourth Form master was making his way rapidly across the Market Square: a resolute figure in Norfolk jacket and grey flannel trousers.

It was not he who had called.

## CHAPTER XII

### GOLD FOR THE MARE

ROBIN turned in the saddle. There was the Cathedral tower, visible above the trees that covered the slope. There was John Fleming's house with its old roof.

The Knight bent and plucked a daisy from the sweet grass.

"Wilt have a song before I go?" he asked of Robin.

"Before you go?" said Robin. "Why are you always saying that?"

"Why indeed?" said the Knight. "It is the way of things."

"But you have never rested. Oh, sire!"

"I must bless Lushdale, even as doth yonder river for ever passing."

"It isn't fair," said Robin. "You'd be so happy. Think what it would be like when you'd sung to the people. 'Now I'm going home,' you'd say. Then you'd walk back home from the Cathedral with your friends, and the people would look at you with a funny smile because you had sung to them and made them happy. Then you would sleep, Knight. Think what it would be to wake or half wake, and feel that Lushdale is all about you. You

would hear the chimes: 'Ding dong, ding dong, ding dong. I am home; I am home.' Then you would wake in the morning, and know that your friends are waking too."

The Knight dug a heel into the grass.

"Thou triest me more than he who wrote the poem? Why is it thou triest me?"

"Perhaps it's because I can't write a poem," said Robin.

"Maybe," said the Knight.

Robin clung to his arm.

"Be bountiful, and tarry, Knight!" he pleaded.

"Nay, nay, Robin lad."

Robin leapt from the mare. The Knight received him into his arms.

"Importunate!" he said, with a little laugh. "Why dost thou make me long to tarry?"

"It isn't me," said Robin. "It's everybody. People want a man who won't let them down."

"James Little, hey?" said the Knight. "Should I wear a coat like James Little?"

"You could if you liked," said Robin. "Oh, sire, you must be so frightfully tired. Won't you stay?"

"Better not." Sadly the Knight shook his head.

"Oh, how I hate that 'Better not,'" said Robin.

"Thou art but a child, Robin. Thou dost not know the world."

"Do you know the world, sire?"

The Knight threw back his head and laughed till the fringe danced on his forehead.

"A hit, Robin lad!" he cried. "What do I know of the world?"

"It's a beautiful world," said Robin. "At least, you could make it beautiful."

"I think I would find it very pleasant," said the Knight.

"If you will stay, I shall look after you," said Robin.

The Knight laughed again.

"If he'd sell me the mare,
I've the price, and to spare;
And she'd not lack for oats and for grooming,"

he sang.

"I know, I know," said Robin. "Granny Maloney."

"What a fierce thing is the faith of a child," said the Knight.

"I'm right, I know I am right," said Robin.

The Knight shook himself.

"Why, Robin lad, maybe you're right;
The world was made for man's delight.
I'll tarry then, and if thou'rt wrong,
I'll take my way at evensong;
I'll take my way by Mallow Ford,
And seek forgiveness of the Lord."

"Go to Granny Maloney," said Robin. "Sell her the mare. I'll come as soon as I can. You promise, sire?"

"I promise on my sword," said the Knight. "Now, for home."

He lifted Robin on the mare. There was a blinding flash of sunlight. Robin's feet clattered on the cobbles. He looked about him for Mr. Little. The Fourth Form master was making across the Market Square, a resolute figure in Norfolk jacket and grey flannel trousers.

## CHAPTER XIII

### GRANNY MALONEY COMES TO THE DOOR

GRANNY MALONEY sat awhile by her window, as was her wont when she had finished her simple round of duties. . . . From her station she could command a view of the road for a considerable distance either way. When she chanced to look out in the forenoon her gaze went eastward, for the Knight came by way of the sea. There were those in Stipton who declared they had seen the mare emerging from the midst of the breakers at sunrise, and to the children in those parts the term "white horses" has something more of meaning in it than mere analogy. It happens that the wave-crests are often very magnificent on Stipton Beach. In the late afternoon, however, Granny Maloney looked westward, and it always seemed there was more of gladness in her eyes than when she looked towards the sea. Granny Maloney was old. She did not seek the Knight with the day's renewal all about him, but rather, she went with him in spirit as he left Lushdale for the hills and the enfolding darkness. It was thus she looked when the Knight rode down from Mallow Ford to make good his

promise to Robin. Here indeed was a reversal of the old order, the wheel set back by the faith of a child. On the rare occasions when the watcher had caught sight of the Knight he had always been facing westward. Either she had seen him as he rounded Lushdale Bend in the freshness of the morning, or else it was that he had climbed up from the town after his day's pilgrimage, and was making towards the setting sun. This evening he rode straight towards her out of a sunset that bathed him in fire. He rode as a weary man will ride, with the bridle loose upon the mare's mane. Granny Maloney rose with her hand to her heart. . . . As he drew nearer the molten fire behind him seemed to turn to bronze, and from bronze to gold. The leaves on the poplars were like golden guineas as they shivered in the evening breeze. . . . The Knight dismounted beneath their whispering talk.

One hand he laid on the mare's saddle, and the other he rounded before his mouth, trumpet-wise.

"Gold for the mare," he called. "What ho, there!"

His cry went down the way like a bell. At its sound the last twittering of the birds was suddenly hushed. Little bright eyes peeped out from hedge and ditch.

Granny Maloney opened her great front door, and made obeisance.

In the meantime, Robin was toiling up the hill from Lushdale with a portmanteau and an umbrella in his hand. He had spent a busy afternoon shopping at Smithson's, with the help of Mrs. St. Clair.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MR. KNIGHT

ROBIN waited at the door of Flint House, while Mr. Knight paid his landlady. Granny Maloney took his sovereign and dropped it into a red money-box on her mantelpiece. There was no call to return it to the survivors of its old associates in the stocking. Granny Maloney's motive for saving had disappeared. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that her gold had fructified.

In the stone stable, Nat expelled his breath through his teeth as he groomed an invisible mare.

"You have been comfortable, I hope," said Granny Maloney. "I hope you have been comfortable."

"Would that I could tarry longer," said Mr. Knight. "But Robin is right. This is not Lushdale."

"Yes, yes," said the old lady. "It would not do for you to lodge with Granny Maloney. I see, I see. I have had my hour."

"I shall often come to see you, ma'am,"

said Mr. Knight. "I shall not forget Flint House where I first broke bread."

"He'll come back for his mare, he'll come back for his mare. I tell you so, I tell you so," screamed the cockatoo from its perch on the curtain rod of Granny Maloney's window of Shallot.

"The mare is mine," said Granny Maloney.

"I will come back for courtesy," said Mr. Knight; and bowed himself out of the stiff little parlour. A portmanteau, an overcoat and an umbrella awaited him in the hall.

"You're sure you've got everything?" said Robin.

"Everything," said Mr. Knight. "Stay, though! That new-fangled razor. Was there not a thong by which one sharpened it?"

"You've forgotten your strop," said Robin. "Half a mo'."

He turned back, to be met by Granny Maloney with the strop.

Mr. Knight and Robin walked the high road to Lushdale. Mr. Knight sang softly to himself. Little white clouds flocked across the blue sky like leisurely sheep. Birds twittered and darted. Already there was the scent of hay in the fields. The Cathedral chime came up to them on the breeze, and like a bourdon under and about the chime came the voice of

Lushdale at work and at play: "The still sad music of humanity."

"Are you liking it, Mr. Knight?" Robin asked.

"Aye, Robin lad. This is very good. I had not thought it could be so good."

They passed market-gardens with cottages standing back from the road. Then they came upon larger houses, set in gardens that grew flowers. They overtook heavy country carts on their way to Saturday's market. Then they were passed by motor-cars and cycles on their way from Lushdale. They passed old and young folk, rich and poor. Some stared at Robin and the stranger. Others did not heed them. They passed by shops with striped awnings; and shops that sought no protection from the sun. They passed shops that displayed pyramids of fruit, and piles of vegetables. They passed shops with tiled walls and floors, and marble slabs whereon lay fish of all hues and sizes. They sniffed innumerable smells from the insistent smell of leather and boot-polish, modest trespassers of the oxygen of Lushdale, to the more heady aromas of the chemist and the confectioner. They passed Mr. St. Clair's brass plate, and Mr. Albertson's model bakery, and so into the Market Square. The old woman with the eggs looked up, and saw the young gentleman who

had mystified her on a previous market-day. He appeared to have found a friend: an uncle, maybe. Mr. Knight might well have been an uncle from foreign parts. He crossed the Market Place like a sightseer, not like a citizen of Lushdale. They passed Dr. Chalmers' house and surgery, and the fine old Georgian residence where dwelt Mr. Cuthbertson, successor to John Fleming. Then they came upon the Close. The chimes gave out ten o'clock. A party of Lushdalians was skylarking about Bishop Poundall's statue. Two char-a-bancs waited to take them to Stipton. They wore the familiar khaki shorts and shirts and broad-brimmed hats. There was a Scout rally at Stipton that day.

"The merrie scholars," murmured Mr. Knight; and set down his portmanteau for a moment or two. "Forward, Robin," he said, as he resumed his burden. "I must not tarry if I would tarry."

Robin laughed.

"I hope we will find daddy in," he said.

They passed through the gate of the Dean's garden, and so on by beds where grew stocks and pinks and roses, to the wisteria that grew over the Mitre Lane side of the house. Below Robin's window stood the door by which the Dean might let himself in and out of the study.

Robin knocked.

" Come in ! "

He turned the handle.

Dr. Strangeways looked up from his desk and beheld his son, and by him a lithe and graceful figure in a grey flannel suit and a Panama hat. The figure was that of a man of thirty-five or six, clean-shaven and bright-eyed.

" Daddy," said Robin, " here is the Knight of Lushdale."

## CHAPTER XV

### THE LAY CLERK OF LUSHDALE

THE Dean made his way home from the Chapter House in the late afternoon. His companion on the one side was Dr. Broom, the Cathedral choirmaster, and on the other, Canon Bidwell, his next-door neighbour. The organist and the canon were both men of stature, and both were heavily bearded. Between them, the Dean looked like Little Tich. There was, however, something commanding, almost Napoleonic, in his stride. His face, too, was informed with an unwonted gravity. He looked like a man who had not slept.

"I fear we shall not keep him," said Dr. Broom. "Heavens, what a voice for Byrd! London will be after him. That's what I'm afraid of."

"That's what I am rather afraid of, too," said Canon Bidwell. "London will be wanting him."

"My dear Canon," said Dr. Broom, "you shouldn't read so many detective stories. It gives you a false sense of values."

"Isn't that rather going back on your bar-

gain, Bidwell?" said the Dean. "You accepted Mr. Knight on his own terms. We all accepted him. Isn't my assurance enough?"

"What does it matter?" said Dr. Broom "as long as he behaves himself? Heavens, what a voice for Purcell! Do you know what I did after I heard him sing! I went home and fished out the old cantata."

"You don't mean to say you are going to finish the cantata?" said Canon Bidwell. "An elusive theme—a most elusive theme. What had the new lay clerk to do with the cantata?"

"I don't know. He inspired me. It is, as you say, an elusive theme, but after our friend Little's wade-in, my little cantata will seem all right. That fellow's singing has set me at it again."

Here the choirmaster took his leave.

"I believe Broom would fill up his choir from Pentonville," said Canon Bidwell, "if Pentonville would supply him with his particular brand."

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that," said the Dean. "I wish you would clear your mind of the idea that I'm trying to harbour an undesirable. I have vouched for Mr. Knight's integrity. You have seen the man for yourself. The Chapter has seen him.

"And heard him," said the Canon. "Divine

divine! What a thousand pities it is that anyone ever invented that abominable phrase, 'the artistic temperament.'"

"I repeat my solemn assurance," said the Dean. "Mr. Knight's reasons for wishing to break with the past are entirely honourable. He has taken me fully into his confidence. I would stake all that I hold dear on the appointment you have just confirmed."

"My dear Dean," said the Canon, "I supported you at the meeting as I have always supported you. I don't think the fellow's a blackguard. All the same, I could wish there were no past for him to break with."

The Dean smiled oddly.

"For my part, I am very glad that there has been a past," he said. "Well, here we are. What a show of daffodils you have, Bidwell."

"Yes, yes," said the Canon. "It's a good hobby; a safe hobby. Why don't you go in for roses, Mr. Dean? You will forgive an old man if I suggest that your need is a good objective like a double trench. Cultivate your garden, Mr. Dean. Good afternoon."

The Dean shook his neighbour's hand. He looked frail and vulnerable; like Robin.

"I'll think over your advice, Bidwell," he said with his disarming smile.

As he turned in at his own gate, he saw that

his wife and son were busy over the large flower-bed by the croquet-lawn.

At the sight of his father, Robin threw down his pruning-scissors and ran to meet him.

"Is it all right, daddy?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the Dean. "He is lay clerk of Lushdale."

## CHAPTER XVI

### MR. LITTLE FINDS HIS MAN

MR. LITTLE walked along Martyr Street with the ghost of three more sleepless nights hard upon his track. The pageant waited on him like a judgment at the end of a fortnight. The committee had split up into cabals ; reformed and split again into disgruntled segments. In the sub-committees, there was "doubt, hesitation and pain." There were resignations and counter-resignations. The latest that morning was Bertie Bidwell's. The Canon's eldest son had succeeded Mr. Albertson. Mr. Little was again bereft of his Knight. There had been letters to the *Lushdale Mercury*. There had been unkindly references to the "Dictator." Mr. Little was feeling something of the loneliness of the men of vision. He had glimpsed the pageant from afar, and it had seemed very good. Now that it was upon him, it threatened to submerge him. He felt that it was absolutely necessary for him to tell out his heart to some one. He must relax to some extent in the presence of some one who would not be altogether unmerciful. Where was such an

one to be found? Mr. Little cast about in his aching brain. He recalled the pink face of Mrs. St. Clair. Mrs. St. Clair had been nice to him over that row with the Publicity Committee. He would go and call upon her.

He turned into Lushmount Road. The solicitor's house stood four-square to the winds of change, and flush with the street.

He rang the bell, and was shown into Mrs. St. Clair's crowded drawing-room. She stood up to greet him from her place beside the tea-tray of inlaid Indian copper.

At the same time Robin rose from the Liberty art couch. With him there rose a stranger in a grey flannel suit.

"Oh, Mr. Little! But how nice! Now I wonder if you have met Mr. Knight yet? No doubt you have heard of him."

Mr. Little turned to the stranger, and met a pair of smiling eyes; eyes that were full of understanding and appreciation. He saw before him a well-groomed man, lithe of figure and graceful of movement; a man well on the right side of forty. His dark chestnut hair was brushed away from his forehead. His jaw was somewhat massive. His nose was emphatically not a Norman nose. It was his smile that made his face beautiful. Mr. Little saw before him the man whom Nature had

intended to play the Knight of Lushdale in his pageant.

He fancied that he saw something further. He fancied that he saw the man who would not let him down ; his man, in short.

" Of course, I have heard of Mr. Knight," he said. " By Sunday evening I hope to be able to say not only that I have heard *of* Mr. Knight, but also that I have *heard* him."

Mr. Little took refuge in a mild joke, as people will when they come upon something rather overwhelming.

" Nay, nay—No, no, that is to say," replied Mr. Knight. " Thou wilt—you will hear me sing ere then, an you wish."

" How very jolly of you ! " said Mr. Little. " I see you've spotted me."

" How so ? " enquired Mr. Knight.

" Why, the lingo, you know. I assure you I think in archaic English these days. That's what comes of having a pageant on your chest."

Robin wrinkled his brow. Mr. Knight flushed. Mrs. St. Clair's china-blue eyes seemed in danger of popping out of her head.

" You're not angry with me ? " asked Mr. Knight.

" Angry ! Good Lord ! Do you think I can't stand a bit of ragging after what I've been through ? But, seriously, Mr. Knight,

you have just come to Lushdale in the nick of time. You have chosen the psychological moment."

"Well, that's jolly!" said Mr. Knight, with a laugh. He seemed to glance at Robin for approval as he came out with the "jolly." He pronounced the word with something of the diffidence and deliberation of a foreigner.

"I don't want to rush you." went on the schoolmaster. "I suppose you have hardly had time to look around. Nevertheless, I should be eternally grateful if you would play the Knight of Lushdale for me."

He turned to Mrs. St. Clair.

"Have you heard that young Bertie B. has gone dog on me?"

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. St. Clair.

"What matter?" said Mr. Little. "If Mr. Knight will toe the line, young Bidwell can go to——"

Mr. Little caught sight of Robin.

"—Los Angeles," he said, "or somewhere where there will be more scope for the Bidwell ego."

Then he grasped the lapel of the lay clerk's new coat.

"You won't fail me, Mr. Knight, will you? You will play the Knight of Lushdale? Knight! By jove, that's damned funny, isn't it? Knight! Don't you see? Mr.

Knight is going to play the Knight. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mrs. St. Clair.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Robin.

"Ha, ha!"

There could be no question as to the genesis of that fourth laugh. Mr. Knight was slapping his knee with merriment.

## CHAPTER XVII

### MISS PRENDERGARST REACTS

RUSHDALE is still a leisurely town, despite the char-a-bancs, and its citizens of all grades are given to gossip by garden gate or alley-way. It would have been surprising had they not paused to discuss the new lay clerk between them.

Canon Bidwell stayed by his green palings with a garden hoe in his hand to indulge in a crack with Miss Tomlinson. That lady was on her way back from the lending library with fresh provender for her mother, an invalid and a voracious reader of novels. Miss Tomlinson always enjoyed a gossip with the Canon. Lushdale seemed to amuse him, too, and just in the right way. The Canon took stock of Miss Tomlinson's trove as she paused to bid him good morning. The paper jackets put all the colours in his garden to shame.

"I can now understand what people mean when they talk of devouring books," he said. "Could anything be more toothsome than that lady with the red parasol."

"Mother will swallow her at two sittings," said Miss Tomlinson.

"Shocking," said the Canon. "Talking of novels, do you know what I've been doing? I've been re-reading 'The Heavenly Twins.' Now don't look at me with that awful accusation I have seen in the eyes of so many clever young people. I know it's *passé*, Early Victorian, *fin-de-siecle*—anything you like. Still, it was a great book in its day—in my day, shall we say?"

"I must read it," said Miss Tomlinson. "Do you read an old novel for every new one that comes out?"

"No. My reasons for routing out 'The Heavenly Twins' may appear a little fantastic. It is the story of a Cathedral town. There is a mysterious tenor in the book, a lay clerk with a past."

"Ah," said Miss Tomlinson. "I must certainly read it."

"What a voice, Canon Bidwell."

The Canon laid down his hoe.

"Ah, lady," he said. "What a voice to be sure."

"Well, whatever it is he's done, I could have crawled on my hands and knees after him when he came to the end of the solo."

"He affected you like that? Dear, dear. I, too, was affected."

"Everybody was," said Miss Tomlinson.

"He had us by the ears," said the Canon.

"The Bishop's lady, and Judy O'Grady. No one was immune. Very remarkable. It will be very difficult for the Dean, I fear—very difficult."

"If the Dean chooses to be so obscurantist, he deserves to have a difficult time. What has Mr. Knight done? Have you any idea, Canon Bidwell?"

"You mustn't call the Dean horrid names," said the Canon. "As to what Mr. Knight has done, that is a question that any of us might find embarrassing. What have *I* done, Miss Tomlinson?"

"Oh, we can get at you through the clergy list. . . . *You've* done quite a number of respectable things. But this casual singer appears from nowhere, and proceeds to melt us down into jelly without so much as a card of reference."

"I admit it would be nicer if we knew he had already melted down the nobility and gentry. My dear Miss Tomlinson, why worry? Let us be thankful for the beautiful voice. I am sure Mr. Knight hasn't done anything very shocking. He is human after all, and, as our dear Mrs. St. Clair would say, baritones will be baritones."

"Yes. But I should like to know just how much of a baritone he has been."

"Ask him, my dear lady. I am sure that

is what the lady with the red parasol would do. She would tax him with it. Perhaps they don't tax one with it nowadays. You see, I belong to the period of Sarah Grand."

"I think I see myself," said Miss Tomlinson. "He would start singing at me, and I should grovel."

"There is something to be said for all this obscurity," said the Canon. "It adds to the man's charm. I confess I have found Lushdale a much more endurable place since his arrival."

Here Robin swung out of the neighbouring gate, and ran swiftly past them in his noiseless sand-shoes.

"Saturday morning," said the Canon, as he followed the scurrying little figure with his eyes. "Ah!"

Miss Tomlinson's eyes were kinder as she, too, looked after Robin.

"There goes somebody who finds Lushdale quite endurable," she said. "What has that child got up his sleeve?"

"Up his sleeve? What do you mean?"

"He always looks to me as if he'd bought Lushdale, and was delighted with the bargain."

"Perhaps he could enlighten us concerning our Mr. Knight. The man can't be a bad 'un or the Dean wouldn't allow his little boy to chaperone him all over the place. Let's hope

for the best, Miss Tomlinson. What a morning! You know that youngster disturbs me. *Et ego in Arcadia vixi.*"

"Me too," said Miss Tomlinson. "Something ought to be done about it."

"Nothing can be done about it," said the Canon. "I must tend my garden."

"And I must tend my mother," said Miss Tomlinson. "Good morning, Canon Bidwell. If I hear anything I'll let you know. I shall not hear anything, of course."

The Canon rose with the hoe in his hand.

"If I hear anything I shall be discreet," he said.

So Miss Tomlinson went on her way, while a little breeze blew down the street, and caught at her hair and skirt. It sang in the telephone wires above her head, and rustled the new leaves of the young plane trees that grew by the footpath. It shook the curtains of Mrs. Tomlinson's sick room, and caused the invalid to look up from the almost exhausted novel on the book-rest. For the moment it was Saturday morning, and she, too, was a child again. . . . She felt the sudden benediction of a day lived long ago, and forgotten, buried under a weight of disillusionment and false romance. It was the morning when she had first been entrusted with the care of a baby brother. They had gathered hare-bells and

she had worn a holland pinafore with a red design that somehow seemed an emblem of the grave and poised happiness of that day. The little breeze swept on, carrying and dissipating the scents from a hundred gardens. It caused a flutter among the paper-covered veterans in the bargain box at Mr. Goodeve's door, and aroused the bookseller from the contemplation of a catalogue. Something was astir in the town of Lushdale. There was expectancy afoot, and a nameless hope. The breeze carried the voice of the Cathedral chime into Mr. Goodeve's shop. Dr. Strangeways banged the pages of a volume of critical essays together, and replaced the book on the shelf with a little grunt.

"What are you up to, Goodeve," he said. "Frowsing in here on such a morning. Habit, simply habit."

"I think," said Mr. Goodeve, "it's a kind of cowardice on my part. Of course I speak for myself, sir."

"Oh, not at all, Goodeve," said the Dean ambiguously as he came to the counter. "How that fellow can sing!"

"Sing?" replied Mr. Goodeve, pushing back his spectacles. "Why, yes. It was something more than just singing. It was."

"Just so," said the Dean, looking very hard at the bookseller.

"Precisely," said Mr. Goodeve, looking very hard at the Dean.

"A very remarkable voice, I repeat," said the Dean. "It somehow makes reading rather irrelevant."

"Exactly," said Mr. Goodeve. "I am tempted to ask myself this question. 'Goodeve, why don't you put up your shutters?'"

"Oh, no, Goodeve. I didn't mean that," said the Dean. "One must read."

"Yes. One must read," said the bookseller. And then Miss Prendergarst came into the shop.

"Good morning, ma'am," said the bookseller. "What a morning."

Miss Prendergarst was non-committal on the subject of the morning. Her chief concern was with a fat and myopic cocker spaniel that gambolled about her skirts.

"Jacky has broken his leash, positively broken his leash. I can't think what has come over him."

"Jacky feels the touch of spring," said the Dean, bending to poke the dog's ribs.

"There's that dreadful mongrel of Mr. Dawes waiting at the corner. . . . Have you a George Herbert, Mr. Goodeve. Selections, you know. Large print."

"I think so," said Mr. Goodeve with an air

of fatherly concern, "but are you quite sure you want it, Miss Prendergarst?"

Miss Prendergarst looked at him sharply for a moment. Then a grim smile lit up her expressive irregular face. She might have posed for a refined type of gargoyle.

"What you think I really want is sanctuary," she said.

"And a stout piece of twine," added the Dean.

"Both are at your disposal," said Mr. Goodeve. "In the meantime I will go and treat with the mongrel."

"You are very kind, Mr. Dean," said Miss Prendergarst.

Here Jacky caused a diversion by dislodging a bundle of books from a chair by the counter. There followed apologies and reconciliations during which the fact came to light that the packet was destined for the new lay clerk.

"Um," said the Dean. "That should put heart into you, Goodeve. He seems to find books necessary."

"Our Mr. Knight is evidently a man of culture," said Miss Prendergarst.

The Dean's eyes twinkled as he weighed the amount of irony that had gone into the speech.

"What a voice," said Mr. Goodeve lamely.

"Yes," said Miss Prendergarst. "What a voice. What a trust. Let us hope for the best." There was war in her eyes as she looked at the Dean.

The little Dean set his shoulders, as if to receive a burden. His smile was very winning.

"I hope for nothing but the best from our Mr. Knight," he said. "'Our Mr. Knight.' Doesn't that sound as if he were a tailor's fitter or something."

"Well, there would be nothing to be ashamed of if he were," said Miss Prendergarst pointedly. "In fact I would be quite reassured to know that he *had* been a tailor's fitter. It would be something to go on."

The Dean sighed.

"I'm afraid I cannot reassure you on that point, Miss Prendergarst. Why, bravo, Goodeve. That's a neat job. The leash is as good as mended. Here, Jacky. Good dog. Now I'll slip out, and dispose of the enemy in the gates."

"It's very undignified," said Miss Prendergarst as the Dean disappeared.

"But very nice of him," added Mr. Goodeve. "A very charming man, a dear fellow."

Miss Prendergarst regarded the bookseller with a certain kind of critical affection. She recognized him as belonging to the old order, despite his ready acceptance of the new Dean.

"I don't take as kindly to change as you do, Mr. Goodeve," she said.

"The old order changes," said the bookseller. "We can't help it. Better make the best of it, hadn't we?"

"Come along, Jacky," said Miss Prendergarst. "Thank you so much, Mr. Goodeve."

There was no sign of the Dawes mongrel when she emerged upon the street, and she made all haste with Jacky in the direction of the towing-path. Away from the menace of motor-cars and bicycles Jacky was released from the hated leash, and waddled happily beside his mistress, until some flash of a bird's wing, or a sudden gust in the willows, would bring back memories of his lost youth. Then Miss Prendergarst, recalled perhaps from a similar happy retrospect, would concern herself about Jacky's safety. So they went, meditating upon the days that were no more; until Miss Prendergarst was recalled violently to the moment by the appearance on the towing-path of a lean and vicious pariah that had strayed away from a Gipsy encampment on Mallow Common. The pariah seemed to take Jacky's sleekness as a personal insult, and proceeded upon the business of wiping the insult out. In vain Miss Prendergarst belaboured with her umbrella. She had walked blindly into the tragedy she had dreaded for years.

Jacky was going to be killed—killed before her very eyes. Oh, why had she come by the towing-path ?

She heard swift footsteps behind her. A grey figure swooped upon the mongrel. She was aware of a hand suddenly reddened with blood. The pariah slunk away whimpering, and Mr. Knight stood before her with Jacky in his arms.

" I am glad that I was in time," he said. " I do not think that he is greatly hurt."

He looked down at the slobbering, whining bundle in his arms.

" I have some skill with wounds. There is a house a little way in front. They will let me have warm water ; that is our first need."

" Oh," cried Miss Prendergarst. " How can you tell me he is not badly hurt ? I'm afraid he is terribly hurt ! "

" Nay, nay," said Mr. Knight gently. " I do not think so. It will be wise to get him to the house. Run on, Robin lad, and tell them what has happened."

Miss Prendergarst noticed the Dean's little boy for the first time.

" Yes, run on, Robin."

Mr. Knight set out for the house.

" Your hand," said Miss Prendergarst. " I had forgotten your hand."

" We will see to that as well," said Mr. Knight. " It is nothing."

"I am sure that Jacky will die. You will have been hurt in vain."

"I am sure he will not die," said Mr. Knight, and he tended Jacky with the skill of a veterinary surgeon, carrying him back to Miss Prendergarst's house in a basket. His command of the situation was complete; yet all the while he behaved to Miss Prendergarst as if he were carrying out her orders. Slowly that lady's self-esteem began to return. She had made what she would have called 'an exhibition of herself' on the towing-path. She had ached to dress Jacky's wounds herself, but Mr. Knight's touch had been so sure that she had stood aside for the dog's sake.

When Jacky had fallen asleep in his basket, and Robin and Mr. Knight had taken their leave, she paused for a little in front of a water-colour sketch which hung in her drawing-room. It was one she had painted of the Knight's window, more years ago than she cared to count.

"Remarkable," she said to herself, "very remarkable. Well, whoever he is, and whatever he was, he handled Jacky like an angel."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE LUSHDALE PAGEANT

MR. LITTLE'S Cathedral made its appearance on the cricket-ground some days before the pageant. It was the work of a scene-painter from London, assisted by the staff of the King's Theatre, Lushdale, and other volunteers. Placed as it was among the elms at the east end of the ground, it stared the cricket-pavilion out of countenance. People were inclined to agree, however, that Mr. Little and his friends from London might have done much worse. One had a view of the western door. The beautifully kept turf of the cricket-ground replaced the flagged pathways and little grass plots of the Close. Bishop Poundall's statue was not represented, for the very good reason that Bishop Poundall, in the person of Mr. Penfold, had to receive Cardinal Wolsey (Colonel Tomkinson) on the site of his effigy.

For a full report of the opening day's proceedings, with a list of episodes, performance, officials, wardrobe mistresses, property masters—in short, for every one worthy of enlist-

ment, the reader must be referred to the files of the *Lushdale Mercury*.

"Lushdale tells her own story"—so ran the heading of Tuesday's report. The article led off with a tribute to the Mayor's courage and initiative, but reserved the finest flowers of its praise for Mr. Little. It was the *Mercury* alone whose praises warmed Mr. Little's heart. Lushdale as a whole was enchanted with the pageant. I do not use the word in any conventional sense. People found themselves drawn, as it were, unawares into a region of faery. The feuds of yesterday were forgotten as the snows of yesteryear. People who had fallen out before Mr. Little had conceived the pageant, met together under its influence and smiled on one another.

"It is extraordinary," said Miss Tomlinson. "When the Knight of Lushdale led us through the streets, Lushdale seemed to dance after him like the children after the Pied Piper. I've seen hilarity at the Eton and Harrow match, or the battle of flowers at Nice, but this was something different."

"I'd put it down to the weather," said Miss Prendergarst. "I've never known such a week."

Indeed, the heavens did smile upon Lushdale pageant.

It was played through six evenings following upon days of shimmering heat, relieved by one

night of rain. The Cathedral cast long shadows across the sunburnt grass. The music of Dr. Broom's orchestra was carried on little breezes laden with garden scents. The people of Lushdale crowded the green western slope of the cricket-ground. The gayest and most fashionable frocks were worn by visitors. The girls who wore the best frocks in Lushdale were, for the most part, herded behind canvas mountains to the north, awaiting their cue. Robin waited his turn with the rest, habited as one of the King's Children.

Contrary to all expectations, Mr. Little brought off Episode Four. Dr. Broom's music may have helped him. The weather certainly did. Whatever the cause, it is certain that from the moment the merrie scholars ran on, laughing and singing, and tossing between them a stuffed ball, such as Harry of England used for tennis, Episode Four gripped. It was so slight an incident to work on. Yet when the Knight of Lushdale pushed open the canvas door, and stepped out into the sunlight on that memorable Monday afternoon, the whole company of the spectators seemed to be held in trance.

Mr. Knight had not much in the way of business to help him out. He paused for a little while, smiling, one hand still upon the great handle of the door. He seemed to wait for

something from the audience, and the people gave it to him: an indefinable tribute expressed by no applause. Then he walked smiling towards the furthermost elm, and so on to the canvas mountains.

> "Give of your proven joy, and bliss,
> We do mistrust our own delight;
> We are not skilled in steadfastness,
> Be bountiful, and tarry, Knight!"

The King's Children called upon him shrilly, imperiously, turning aside from their game, and stretching out appealing arms towards him. Dr. Broom's violins and woodwind blended with the high, pure notes of the choristers. The sound was borne to the waiting people on the green slope. Mr. Knight paused, and turned towards them. Robin saw him lift up his arm, as if in blessing. Thus had he seen the Knight of Lushdale stand a little way from Mallow Ford. Then he turned and walked northward till the elm tree hid him. The King's Children returned to their play, singing. They tossed the ball about for a little, and then fell to playing leap-frog: which led them to the southern exit, and cleared the way for Episode Five. The spectators cheered them as they disappeared.

At the close of the first performance on Monday afternoon the company marched in

procession to the Guildhall to be thanked and refreshed by the Mayor. It was then that there occurred that interesting demonstration to which Miss Tomlinson referred.

The Knight of Lushdale went through the streets of his beloved town, and the people hailed him. The route had been decorated with bunting. Windows and shop-fronts were crowded. Hundreds who had not been able to see the first performance thronged the pavements. Over all the sunlight streamed. About the midst of the procession the Mallowshire's Band played Dr. Broom's march. At the head of it all walked a figure in chain mail and surcoat void of any emblem. He held his plumed helm in his right hand, and smiled. All along the way the people cheered him, and threw him flowers. It was all very un-English and inexplicable. As the procession crossed King Street, a governess-cart on its way to Lushmount Road came to a halt.

> "Rich Granny Maloney,
> Give her some oats for her pony."

Some of the children were diverted for a moment from the Knight. Granny Maloney stood up in her place, tall and gaunt. She spoke no word, but held out her arms to the Knight. Her gesture reminded many who saw her of the King's Children when they beckoned.

The Knight looked up at her. Then he disengaged a rose that had stuck in his chain mail, and deftly threw it to her. As deftly she caught it, and pressed it to her bosom.

The people laughed and cheered.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE LAST WICKET

"THE following will represent the Dean's Men in their match against the Foundlings."

The sporting page of *The Lushdale Mercury* followed with a list of eleven names :—" Dr. Strangeways, Colonel Tomkinson, Dr. Broom, T. G. Plumtree, Rev. P. Westby, Rev. J. W. Trench, R. K. W. Little, T. Bidwell Smith, C. Tait, N. Drever and C. Knight."

Lushdale read the list with interest, and not a little mystification.

" Our volatile Dean again," said Miss Prendergarst. " Who may the Foundlings be, I wonder ? "

We have already heard of a group of young men in flannels, who had taken the Dean to their hearts over a short week-end.

The reading-party, supplemented by several younger brothers from public schools, had sent Dr. Strangeways a challenge from Cambridge, which he had accepted. He had then gathered about him the Dean's Men. Lushdale had been treated to such a riot of colour of late that the appearance of a few exotic blazers

in the neighbourhood of the Deanery produced something of the effect of an Indian summer. The Foundlings attracted a little attention, however. It was told at the Choir School that their numbers included a blue and two Leanders. It was true that the blue had been won on the river; but a blue of any sort was a phenomenon to attract the autograph-hunters and photographers.

Robin found that some of the reflected glory of the great man fell upon himself. He traded on the fact that the blue was the Dean's guest. He was, however, very unhappy at the inclusion of Mr. Knight among the Dean's Men. He went with his trouble to Mr. Goodeve, with whom he had struck up a friendship after their joint encounter with the Knight.

"It's very awkward," he said. "Mr. Knight has never played cricket before. He won't say 'No.' I can't understand what daddy is up to."

It was not the first time that Robin had worn the harassed look of an impressario with an eccentric genius on his hands. Mr. Knight's lapses into archaisms had grown less frequent. Still, one never knew when an unbidden 'thee' or 'thou' would come to his lips at some moment of stress.

"Bertie Bidwell has a theory that he's a

renegade from a community of Quakers," Miss Tomlinson had said at one of Mrs. St. Clair's afternoons.

"Do Quakers play cricket?" some one had replied. "I see he is included among the Dean's Men."

Miss Prendergarst had caught the sound of the new title.

"I've no patience with all this masquerade. What would Dean Jennings have said of it?"

Miss Tomlinson had entered the lists at this point.

"I think it is just what we want. It brings colour into life."

"Haven't we had enough colour?" Miss Prendergarst had sighed. "I've no patience with these panaceas. You won't bring about a new Heaven and a new Earth by Morris dancing and calling beer ale."

"Well, let us hope the Dean's Men will acquit themselves," their hostess had broken in.

"Like men," Miss Tomlinson had taken up the running. "I see Gerontius is last on the list."

"Why Gerontius?"

"Oh, he always makes me think of those lines in *The Dream:*

> "That shapeless, scopeless, blank abyss,
> That utter nothingness from whence I came."

It's absurd for a man to burst on us out of the unknown, and not expect us to question the void."

But to return to Robin and Mr. Goodeve.

"It's very awkward," Robin repeated as he drummed his toes against Mr. Goodeve's counter.

The bookseller solemnly lifted the trencher from the head of his young friend where he sat, and placed it upon his own grey crop.

"Never played cricket before? Yes, that is awkward."

"He is so quick at everything," said Robin. "He thinks cricket is a thing you just start playing without any trouble."

"They say slow bowlers are born, not made."

"But you don't understand," said Robin. Then, involuntarily, he checked himself. Why was it that he could not boldly declare to the bookseller that the Knight had come to tarry and learn?

"What don't I understand?" said Mr. Goodeve, putting his hand up to the region of his understanding, and dislodging his thinking cap. "There are so many things I don't understand."

Robin picked up his trencher.

"It's very awkward," he said. "It's like daddy with his flute."

Robin had suffered silent agonies through that flute of his father's. The Dean did not seem able to understand that one has to be taught to play the flute. It pained Robin to see one whom he loved making what Miss Prendergarst would have called 'an exhibition of himself.' He dreaded lest it should be like that when Mr. Knight went in to bat.

"Send him to me," said Mr. Goodeve. "I think I might put him up to some wrinkles."

"Oh, if you'd only talk to him!" said Robin.

"I know something about the game," said the bookseller.

What happened on the strip of lawn behind the bookseller's shop the following evening, only the rooks could tell, as they made their way across a saffron sky towards the Cathedral. They might have looked down upon an elderly cripple with upstanding grey hair, holding in his hand a small and much be-spliced bat. With this he was executing various lunges and passes for the instruction of an interested onlooker in a grey flannel suit. If the rooks had tarried on Mr. Goodeve's roof, they would have seen the younger man with the bat in his hand. They might have seen him catching a new cricket-ball hurled from the cripple's grasp, or trundling the same

ball in the direction of an inverted drain-pipe.

"I think that will do," Mr. Goodeve had said as the chimes tolled out the half-hour. "The light is failing. Come and smoke a pipe with me in my sitting-room."

Mr. Knight had followed his host upstairs, and they had sat by the open window, Mr. Knight pulling at his new briar, and the old man fondling a meerschaum.

"It was on just such an evening," Mr. Goodeve had said, "that I last played with that bat. I've kept it a long while. One keeps things, you know. The tug of life is very strong on us, despite the Knight of Lushdale."

He shot a glance at his companion. Mr. Goodeve's hair was grey, but for the moment he looked like a rebellious boy.

Mr. Knight's eyes regarded him steadily and kindly in the growing dusk.

"Lushdale holds us to her heart," he replied. "Still, the Knight is right."

"I should like to speak of that time," Mr. Goodeve had said. "Would it bore you, I wonder?"

Mr. Knight had bowed in his odd foreign way.

"I am never bored with a true tale," he had replied.

"I was walking home from the cricket-ground," Mr. Goodeve had begun, dreamily. "Not the ground you know, sir. It was the old school-ground where the chemical laboratories and workshops are now. I don't know if you will understand me, but I was overtaken by a mood which I have known from time to time: a sense of everything slipping into place. I was very happy; I suppose I was young and vigorous; and the evening—well, look out there. It was like that. There came a great longing to hold fast to that mood. Happiness is such a brittle thing. I longed for some one with whom I might share my joy."

"Yes, yes. Be bountiful, and tarry, Knight!"

"How do you know that I saw him?"

"There are others who have seen him here in Lushdale. Who more likely than a happy boy on his way home of a Friday evening?"

"How do you know it was a Friday evening?"

"A boy is happy on a Friday evening oftenest. There is Saturday to come, and Saturday sometimes disappoints."

"I have heard him since then, I think; but never again have I seen him. That is to say——"

Mr. Goodeve had paused with his pipe gripped in his hand.

"It was on such an evening that last you saw him," said Mr. Knight gently. "Strange."

"I have read books," Mr. Goodeve had continued. "Oh, thousands of books! One thinks that they help one at times; but one loses heart. There is so much bitterness in the world, so much cynicism. Often I just read about cricket. I have taken a vicarious pleasure in cricket since my accident. I'm afraid I drone on, Mr. Knight."

"I have been so interested," Mr. Knight had replied. "You have done me great honour."

"Let me explain the positions of the field," Mr. Goodeve had said, half ashamed of his outburst; and he had launched upon a dissertation—which Mr. Knight had not been very successful in following—if one were to judge from his behaviour next day.

The Foundlings won the toss, and went in to bat. As the Dean led his men into the field, the eyes of many were upon Mr. Knight. Mr. Goodeve watched him from his accustomed place at the scoring-table. Miss Prendergarst watched him from her camp-stool. In past days she had bowled lobs to a young brother who had afterwards played for Mallowshire. Cricket, Jacky, and the Cathedral consoled Miss Prendergarst for many things. Robin

watched him from his place among a knot of schoolfellows. He saw him bend and pluck a daisy with a graceful and easy movement, and thought of the daisies in the long grass by Mallow Ford. Mr. Knight looked like a born cricketer in his new flannels. It was only after the first over that Robin's agonies began. As the umpire walked away from the southern crease, and the field began to change in that automatic fashion that always makes cricket such a solemn affair, Mr. Knight's mystification was complete.

" 'Blank misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realized,' " Miss Tomlinson quoted from her place by Bertie Bidwell's side. " Won't some one tell him where mid-on goes ? "

The trouble was that everybody was trying to tell him. Mr. Little, who was faddy about his field, stood with the ball in his hand and gesticulated. The Dean shouted unintelligible commands from the slips.

Robin felt himself grow hot and prickly as the schoolmaster walked up to the lay clerk, and gently but firmly led him to the proper place. Mr. Knight did not seem to resent this treatment in the least. He merely bowed and smiled.

Robin pulled up handfuls of grass. His companions tittered. Shortly afterwards the

titters swelled to a roar as Mr. Knight sat down on the green sward, utterly taken aback by a clean drive from one of the Leanders. Shortly after this he dropped a catch.

Mr. Goodeve groaned.

"He took a dozen of those last night," he said to himself.

As the innings wore on Mr. Knight seemed to find himself.

Mr. Goodeve's spirits rose as he saw his man bring off a flukey one-handed catch which dismissed the Foundlings' slogger.

Mr. Knight sought the bookseller at the close of the innings.

"How very droll!" he said. "They are all so solemn. Did you see our friend, Plumtree?"

"Plumtree once kept wickets for Mallowshire," said Mr. Goodeve, severely.

"Did he walk up and down like that?"

"Of course. He had to change ends in those days just as he did to-day."

"But why so sad about it?" asked Mr. Knight.

Something in Mr. Plumtree's abstracted air as he marched from one crease to the other had tickled Mr. Knight. He had looked at him very much as the Knight had looked down on the senior verger when he conducted a

party of visitors. Indeed, it was his preoccupation with Mr. Plumtree that had been his undoing at the beginning of the game.

"You shouldn't have dropped that catch," said Mr. Goodeve.

"I shall drop no more," said the lay clerk "I was unhorsed at my first joust."

"Your what?" said the bookseller.

At that moment, however, the Dean appeared to dictate the names of his men in their batting order.

"I'll put you in sixth wicket down, Knight," he said. "Ah, Goodeve, how you love the blank page of a scoring book."

"Very restful to the eyes," said Mr. Goodeve. "Whom do you take in with you, Mr. Dean?"

The Dean took in Westby, the curate from Lushmount, who had never succeeded in finding Granny Maloney at home.

The wickets fell quickly, though the scoring was merry. Robin was very quiet as Mr. Knight walked to the wicket. He had that dogged panther-like tread which had been his as he went swishing through the long grass by the mare's side.

"I like him better in chain mail," said Miss Tomlinson.

"My chain mail," said Bertie Bidwell.

"They're not your flannels, I hope," said

Miss Tomlinson. "Miss Ponsonby is nervous about Mrs. Carstairs' spoons."

Mr. Knight opened his shoulders to the first ball. It soared into the air, and fell a few yards short of the pavilion, safely into the hands of a tall Foundling who had been stationed 'in the country.' Mr. Knight returned to the pavilion with a radiant smile.

"What a hit," he said, "and what a catch!"

"Thanks awfully!" said the Foundling, and the pavilion rocked with laughter.

Robin pulled up more handfuls of grass. How dared they laugh! The Dean's Men averted a follow-on by a few runs, and the Foundlings went in for the second time. Mr. Little found his length, and the Foundlings found their way back to the pavilion almost as rapidly as the Dean's Men had done. It appeared that the match was going to be played out to a finish, and that the finish was going to be a close one.

The elms cast great shadows across the ground, the rooks began to wheel homeward.

Colonel Tomkinson, who had been assiduously practising a golf swing, knocked down his wicket after one boundary hit.

Mr. Plumtree ran into double figures, and was caught in the slips. Others came and went, and all the while the little Dean snicked

and poked and whittled down the Foundlings' lead. It seemed, however, that his efforts had failed: for there wanted thirty-seven runs when the ninth wicket fell, and the figure of Mr. Knight emerged from the darkling pavilion.

"There's a breathless hush in the Close to-night!" said Bertie Bidwell.

"Shame!" said Miss Tomlinson. "Have you no restraint?"

"I admit it was rather obvious," said Bertie.

The Dean continued to angle for the last ball of the over, which he generally managed to hit for a single; but after Mr. Knight had hit three fours he changed his tactics. The light was so bad that stumps would have to be drawn after another over or two.

Robin will always remember how those two well-liked figures flitted up and down the pitch with the speed of figures in an accelerated cinematograph picture: "'Op-o'-me-thumb and the Prince," as Mr. Plumtree called them in his delight.

The Foundlings grew rattled as victory was postponed with every ball. Mr. Knight hit out at everything, and laughed as he hit. His laughter rang out across the field like his song.

"He shouldn't laugh like that," said Miss Prendergarst. "Somebody should tell him. Oh, well hit!"

Mr. Knight hit another four; Dr. Strangeways poked a single; and then the lay clerk made the winning hit.

The lights of Lushdale were beginning to twinkle before the pavilion shutters were up. Mr. Knight walked home through the dusk with his friends 'walking along with him.'

As they reached the Close, he felt Robin's hand thrust into his.

"This is what I meant, sire. It's topping, isn't it?"

"Aye, Robin lad."

"Good night, sire."

"Good night, Robin."

An hour later the lay clerk was sitting at supper with the Foundlings and the rest of the Dean's Men. They were gathered in one of the old rooms of the Resting Angel. The candlelight was reflected by the great oaken roof-beams. Glasses clinked, and the loving-cup was passed round. The Dean sat in the midst of his dear enemies, and told of the days when he coxed a trial eight at Ely. Mr. Plumtree was the hero of the youngest of the visitors, and spoke of the day when he whipped off the bails and sent 'W. G.' back to the pavilion.

Mr. Goodeve set his crutches down by Dr. Broom's side, and they talked of the days when they had played cricket on the old

school-ground. Dr. Broom was not allowed to sit for long, for there were constant calls for another song.

Every one sang.

In the end there were calls for Mr. Goodeve, who stood up and gave them "Willow the King" where he stood.

As Mr. Knight joined in the chorus his voice sounded as it had done when Robin first heard him sing in praise of Lushdale.

## CHAPTER XX

### WALKER MAJOR REACTS

WALKER MAJOR searched the Blundell Reference Library for Timothy Hill's *Lushdale Worthies*.

Yet another memorial of the bishop to his son took the form of an annual prize for an essay on the history of Lushdale. It was open to all who received emolument from the Cathedral chest, and had always been carried off by one of the students from the Theological College. The boys of the Choir School were eligible for the prize by the terms of the benefaction, as indeed was the Dean. Up till that year, however, there had been found no scholar precocious enough to pit himself against grown men.

Walker Major had set his heart on winning the Blundell Prize for himself, and, incidentally, for the school.

Some period in the history of Lushdale was chosen by those who administered the Blundell Trust. People who were interested in the Blundell Prize feared that Mr. Little's pageant might take from its effectiveness. What was there to say of the history of

Lushdale after so much research on behalf of the Episodes ?

Walker Major did not share these fears. He had not been one of those who had strewn flowers at the feet of the Knight. He had read of the pageant from a bed of sickness. The nature of his ailment inclined him to take a jaundiced view of the proceedings. There were many facts about Lushdale in the reign of Queen Elizabeth (his period) that the pageant had not brought to light.

Timothy Hill's book was a storehouse of facts. A judicious selection of these facts would help him towards the kind of essay he wanted to write. He did not want to give too drab a picture, but he certainly did not want to sentimentalize over Lushdale. Timothy Hill was a realist. His pictures out-Hogarthed Hogarth. Walker Major set about collecting and correlating his facts with his usual thoroughness. He had the mental stamina of one of those German professors whose books the Dean read at the back of Mr. Goodeve's, and demolished to his own satisfaction from the Cathedral pulpit.

Walker Major, then, haunted the little library in search of his facts. He also brought books with him to John Fleming's old house : books to help him with his matter, and books to help him with his style. He liked to read

in the museum because it was quiet, and because it was what he would have called a 'wheeze' to sit in an old house when one read the masters. He liked to sit by a showcase full of old Mallow pottery, with his large head bent over a volume of Hazlitt or Green; or loll about the library with his Timothy Hill. He was thus engaged when a bird flew in through an open window, and, as is the way with birds, became so overwhelmed by klaustrophobia that it was deprived of its reasoning powers. It beat against the walls and bookshelves, and eventually lodged in a ventilator where it continued to disregard the large notice enjoining "Silence!" The rule was broken also by the few students and visitors who happened to be in the building.

"The poor thing will kill itself," said some one.

"A stepladder," said somebody else.

A stepladder was produced, and an interested spectator in a grey flannel suit mounted to the rescue. The ladder was a poor-spirited affair, and collapsed beneath him. Mr. Knight took his toss with the same equanimity with which he had dropped that catch.

"Get another ladder," he said.

"If you were to get on a chair, and poke it with a stick," said Walker Major.

"If I were to get on a chair, and you were to get on my shoulders," said Mr. Knight.

"It wouldn't be safe," said somebody else.

"It would be a bit of a gymkhana," said Walker Major. "Let's try."

They tried and succeeded.

"Well," said Walker Major, as he returned from the window, "that chap didn't want to tarry."

Mr. Knight, who had picked up Timothy Hill, handed it to him with a bow.

"You find the old fellow interesting?" he asked. "I did not know they read Hill these days."

Walker Major looked at the lay clerk with an awakened interest.

"Have you tackled Hill?" he asked.

"I'm acquainted with him," Mr. Knight replied.

The curator of the museum sounded his electric bell.

"Hall hout," said Walker Major. "What a nuisance! I think they might let me take Hill home with me. But no. That is one of the rules that always has been, and as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be——"

"I've heard them say," said Mr. Knight, "that Hill is not reliable."

"Heard them say?" echoed Walker Major.

"If you please, gentlemen," said the curator.

"Shall we walk a little way together?" said Mr. Knight. He seemed to hesitate upon the question, as if he feared a rebuff.

"If it's not taking you out of your way," Walker replied, a little puzzled. "Don't you live on the tony side of the Close? I'm a pleb. We live in Quair Street—Queer Street, some people call it."

"I'm so interested in your reading Hill," said Mr. Knight.

"It's very nice of you," replied Walker. "I have hopes the old boy will help me to win the Blundell Prize."

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Knight. "Lushdale does not forget her poet."

Walker found himself making for home with the lay clerk by his side.

"You are a diligent student," said Mr. Knight.

"Oh, I've always been fond of reading," Walker Major replied.

Mr. Knight had touched upon his one vanity.

"Mr. Goodeve is a great reader," said Mr. Knight, "a rapid reader; but he does not seem to assimilate his reading like the Dean."

"Yes," said Walker Major, "the Dean is a packet of squibs, isn't he? One thing I will

say for him : he doesn't ram the Knight down our throats."

"Perhaps he thinks," said the lay clerk, "that the Knight needs no introduction."

"Yes," replied his companion, "we've had quite enough of him. Oh, I beg your pardon. I'd forgotten. I didn't see the pageant. Of course, you *are* the Knight, aren't you ?"

"There may be other opportunities of seeing him," said Mr. Knight.

"Oh, don't set Jumbo Little on to another pageant," said Walker. "Let well alone."

"Not another pageant," said the lay clerk.

"I'm afraid I've made a *faux pas*," said Walker Major.

"I do not think so," replied the lay clerk. "Just now you said, 'You *are* the Knight.' You spoke truly. I am the Knight."

"Monomania," thought Walker Major. "Didn't Penley think he was Charlie's Aunt ?"

"It may seem strange for me to say so," went on the lay clerk, "but I believe I could help you to win the Blundell Prize. It would give me much pleasure if you would take tea with me to-morrow at five. I lodge with Mrs. Carstairs in the Poundall Road."

"Thanks very much," said Walker Major. "I'll be there. Good evening."

It was only after Mr. Knight had turned

away with a wave of the hand that a thought occurred to Walker.

"I suppose he would take that parody of mine as a personal insult. What a very attractive lunatic."

Next day he sought out the lay clerk's lodgings, and was shown into the sitting-room. The octagonal table had a white cloth upon it. There was cake upon the table; there were cress sandwiches, and some very late strawberries in a basket. There were three cups and saucers, and three plates. Walker was speculating about this third plate when Mr. Knight came in.

"I am so glad you've come," he said. "I am hoping for a good yarn. My other guest should be here."

As he spoke there was a knock upon the door.

"Hallo, sire!"

Robin burst into the room.

"Hallo, Robin lad!"

But Robin was staring at Walker Major with the old bunny look.

"Hallo, Strangeways," said Walker Major. He did not look very self-possessed himself.

Mr. Knight glanced from one to the other. For both he had that smile, half humorous, half rueful, full of understanding and compassion, yet a jolly, reassuring smile withal.

Walker Major looked at his host narrowly. Was this a very explicable accident, or was there some method in Mr. Knight's madness ?

" Sire," choked Robin, " he called you a cheat. He said—he said—I can't forget."

" Nay, nay, Robin lad," said Mr. Knight. " Thou didst beg me to tarry, and now thou wouldst drive me away."

There were very few occasions on which Walker Major was at a loss for words, but this was one of them. He thought of beating a retreat. One lunatic might conceivably be company, two was none.

" I think," said Mr. Knight, " it would be rather jolly to have some tea."

Robin with his face flushed, and the tears standing in his eyes, slipped into his chair like a naughty child released from durance.

" I don't know what he's talking about," said Walker Major. " I wish he'd be a little more explicit in his charges."

" I apologise," said Robin.

" Do let us be jolly," said Mr. Knight.

" By all means," said Walker Major, as he took his place opposite Robin.

" We were talking of Timothy Hill, my friend Walker and I," the lay clerk said as he handed a cup. " I may call you Walker ? "

" That's my name."

" Walker and I were discussing Timothy

Hill, Robin. You've never heard of Timothy Hill, Robin lad ? "

Robin shook his head.

" I don't think the Dean would leave Hill lying about," Walker drawled.

Robin saw the beginning of that familiar sneer. He looked up at Mr. Knight. For one desolating moment it seemed that the subject of Walker's parody was siding against him. He almost feared to see something in his host's smile that would have made him wish that the Knight's window had not been overlooked by Cromwell. He was reassured. Mr. Knight's eyes were candid and kindly. Robin, who, as the reader may have gathered, was inclined to be fussy over Mr. Knight, felt himself rebuked. It was a bracing experience.

" Timothy Hill," said Mr. Knight, " knew Lushdale well ; but what he did not succeed in doing was to get into the mind of a man like John Fleming. He could never have understood our poet's treatment of the legend."

Then he proceeded to deliver John Blundell's poem in its entirety. He recited with the slightest shade of hesitancy, and with something of the conscientiousness of a foreigner with regard to terminals and aspirates. He seemed to take such a delight in Blundell's tapestry of words that he infected his audience with his enthusiasm.

"By Jove!" said Walker Major at the close of the recitation.

Robin was silent.

Mr. Knight began to praise Lushdale. He spoke of the configuration of the country round about, of the view from Lushmount, of the way the houses on the hill reflected the westering rays of the sun with their windows. He soliloquized happily and gently. The two boys listened, and both were drawn into that web of enchantment the Knight had woven about the people at the time of the pageant. Through the open window came the Cathedral bells calling Lushdale to evensong.

"Heavens," said the lay clerk. "It's Thursday, isn't it? I must fly. We've hardly had a word about your essay. Come again."

They hurried down the stairs together, and Mr. Knight dashed off with a salute.

"It will be a pity when they lock him up," said Walker Major, as he looked after the retreating figure.

Robin shuffled with his feet.

"By Jove, Strangeways, I'd forgotten all about you," Walker continued. "I believe you are both batty, but you were right about that parody. Who was it said he would rather be mad with Blake than sane with Flaxman?"

"I don't know," said Robin truthfully.

"Perhaps we're all mad," said Walker

Major as he turned to go. "I don't know, I'm sure."

Robin propped himself against Mrs. Carstairs' window-ledge, and watched the ungainly retreating figure. It was a great relief to feel that the old stumbling-block had been removed. Walker Major was no longer hateful.

As Robin watched him turn the corner, it almost seemed that Walker Major was pathetic. Even such an one the Knight may have passed in John Fleming's day.

Robin wondered if Timothy Hill had been like Walker Major.

## CHAPTER XXI

### WINIFRED FINDS HER NICHE

MR. KNIGHT took a room in the upper storey of Smithson's Buildings. His modest little plate bore this inscription: "MR. CHRISTIAN KNIGHT. Teacher of Singing." There were no letters after his name such as graced the plate of his neighbour, Adrian Walker, surgeon dentist. Mr. Knight, however, did not lack for pupils. People who heard him sing in the Cathedral or the Guildhall climbed the stone stairs to find out how he did it. Dr. Broom sent him pupils. The new lay clerk, however, was careful not to disturb any of the established teachers. He accepted only those who came from the choirmaster, and a few absolute tyros to whose guineas he had as good a right as any one. Concert engagements followed in neighbouring towns, but Mr. Knight was loyal to Lushdale, and seemed quite content if he had the wherewithal to pay Mrs. Carstairs, and to meet his own modest wants. The sitting-room with the octagonal table did not come at once. Mr. Knight discussed the matter gravely with Robin before he launched out into this further

expense. To the boy every new stick of furniture acquired by the lay clerk was like a sacrament. "How good is man's life, the mere living." That was Robin's credo, and life as he knew it meant towel horses, neat piles of clothes, pretty chintz curtains, boot trees and trouser presses. Mr. Knight delighted in all these things. He had passed so many open windows in his time, and caught sight of the things that hold folk to a home. Robin's journeys to and from the Poundall Road were frequent, but he contrived in some inexplicable fashion to escape overmuch comment. Canon Bidwell, it is true, had remarked that the child was often in the baritone's company, but even Mrs. Carstairs had no idea how often Robin came and went. One took him for granted, like the postman.

Mr. Knight went off to Dr. Broom for his music lesson on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The little rosewood piano at Flint House might have told the story of the lay clerk's introduction to modern music. But however apt Mr. Knight might be, it could hardly be expected of him to play the accompaniments of songs with any fluency, and herein lay Mrs. St. Clair's opportunity of settling the recurrent problem of what to do with Winifred Coot. Winifred had gone a-gipsying.

It is not to be supposed that she came to any serious harm. She had a nomadic strain in her which rebelled against the Powell influence.

Mr. Little, in search of copy for those bright little sketches he contributed to the *Mallowshire Free Lance*, had come upon her, playing the piano for a troupe of entertainers at a fair on Mallow Common. Knowing Mrs. St. Clair's solicitude for the child, he persuaded her to give the Close another chance. Winifred did not need much persuading. She had a real gift for music, and the kind of thing she was doing went somewhat against the grain. So back Winifred came, and continued to occupy an indeterminate position between the folk who lived in the Close and the folk who rang their tradesmen's bells. This time she did not attempt to live with incompatible aunts, but a home was found for her with Miss Lorraine, a lady of broad views who edited the *Mallowshire Free Lance*, and was a consistent champion of the rights of the individual. She was not the kind of lady who talks sententiously of "the cross roads." Winifred would have been off again had she thought she was being regarded as a "case." Mrs. St. Clair looked about her to see what could be done to keep the child happy and occupied. For a time she worked with Dr. Broom, who was having one of his periodical spring cleanings in the choir

library, and wanted some one who understood music manuscripts. She quarrelled with Dr. Broom, and Mrs. St. Clair found her an old lady who wanted a young thing to come and read to her.

After a time she quarrelled with the old lady, and once more she was upon Mrs. St. Clair's hands. At this point it must be reaffirmed that this is a story of a great thing and of many little happenings. It will never be known, I suppose, in what light Mrs. St. Clair regarded the coming of the new lay clerk. She knew he was Robin's friend, for she knew about the purchase of that flannel suit at Smithson's. But how much more did she know? Mrs. St. Clair had such a disconcerting way of pulling herself up, as if stung by a recollection, when she spoke of Mr. Knight. She always appeared as the puzzled possessor of a half-secret. At any rate, when the great thing happened she saw in it an occasion for the settling of a little matter, the little matter of what to do with Winifred. Mr. Knight and Robin came to her for advice. They were seeking a professional accompanist. Mr. Knight could not teach without one. Mrs. St. Clair beamed upon them.

"There is a young lady called Winifred Coot," she said. "I have no doubt as to her qualifications. If only she won't quarrel with

you, Mr. Knight. She's difficult. Oh, this would be such a chance for her."

Mr. Knight glanced approvingly at the cuffs of his new shirt.

"Lady," he said, "there are so many delightful things to quarrel about. Robin and I often fall out on a little matter. He is very obstinate. This Winifred Coot cannot be as obstinate as Robin."

"If Winifred Coot looks half as happy as Robin," thought Mrs. St. Clair, "she can quarrel with you all day."

What she actually said was, "You can see for yourself, Mr. Knight. I could arrange for you to meet her here."

Winifred Coot was summoned to a meeting a few days later. She arrived at Mrs. St. Clair's doorstep just as Robin emerged. As usual he had been unostentatiously stage-managing Mr. Knight. He had flown after him with a sheaf of music, test pieces for Winifred, which the lay clerk had forgotten to bring with him. Winifred's lips quivered into a strange little smile as Robin held the door open for her. His eyes smiled back at her. She could not tell why they made her think of that first golden journey to Lushdale. Their happy serenity contrasted forcibly with the eyes of Ishmael, of whom she had been thinking.

"Hallo," said Robin. "Here you are."

Winifred tilted her mushroom hat in a little nervous gesture.

"Hello," she said. "You're Robin Strangeways, aren't you? How did you know me?"

"I've heard you play. He's waiting for you."

"Tell me," said Winifred. "Is he hard to please?"

Robin grinned.

"Hard to please!" he said. "I *don't* think."

Having thus set his scene, the stage-manager capered off, and was round the corner before Winifred could put another question. The maid who stood to receive her gave her no such welcome. She was of the Close closey, and silently disapproved Winifred Coot. However, when the slight timid figure in the large straw hat and simple holland frock was ushered into Mrs. St. Clair's drawing-room the temperature warmed appreciably.

"Winifred, my dear," spake Mrs. St. Clair, "I knew you would not fail me. What a pretty frock. You don't mind an old friend remarking on it? This is Mr. Knight."

She studied the girl's face as Winifred turned to the lay clerk, and as she did so she tried to

recall something Walter Pater had written of Botticelli. Was it Botticelli? Mrs. St. Clair had not a tidy mind. The essayist had spoken of a certain air of reluctance in the faces of those olive-skinned *enfants de chœur* one may see in Italian churches. Winifred looked very boyish as she gazed up at Mr. Knight, her lips a little parted, the colour mounting into her dark cheek. She almost seemed to frown at him. It was just in that way Ezra's Bambino had looked at the Knight's window.

"You will come to my help, Miss Coot, I hope," said the lay clerk. "You see, I'm a singer, not a musician." He gave a deprecating little laugh. "I know how an accompaniment should be played, but there I stop." He began to look distressfully about for Robin. Winifred's gaze was disconcerting. Her eyes seemed to speak, and the words they spake chimed with a stanza of John Blundell.

> But there are some, who, though they call
> Most sweetly for that dear respite,
> Would know a joy that doth appal
> If thou shouldst hear, and tarry, Knight!

Mrs. St. Clair came to the rescue.

"And that's where you begin, Winifred," she said. "Mr. Knight has brought some music."

Winifred took one of the sheets, and glanced at the notes and key signature. Mr. Knight burst out laughing at the little sigh of relief that escaped her.

" That is the most difficult of them," he said reassuringly. " Now, shall I sing ? "

" You ? " said Winifred.

" Why, yes," said Mr. Knight, " for the time being I will be one of my own pupils. Now, Miss Coot."

Winifred sat down at the piano, and played the introduction. Mrs. St. Clair was rewarded for her pains by a recital such as she had never listened to before.

" I wonder if I have done well," she said to herself when Winifred and her new employer had taken their leave. There was that in Winifred's face which had almost frightened her as the girl turned from the piano at the end of the first song.

Mrs. St. Clair was to ask herself that question repeatedly. In the light of what followed it is for the reader to side for or against that well-meaning lady.

## CHAPTER XXII

### UNTIL YOU BLESS ME

WINIFRED climbed the stairs of Smithson's Buildings a little wearily. As she approached the door with the modest brass plate upon it, Robin emerged. He was radiant, if a thought dishevelled.

"Hallo," he said. "You won't know the old studio now. We've been putting up some more pictures. It's a regular gallery."

The girl's smile was almost propitiatory.

"More pictures," she said. "Why are you always bringing things up here?"

Robin's eyes went from her to the grey oblong of skylight above their heads.

"Oh, I dunno," he said. "The more the merrier. That's what I say. Things make him want to stay."

Winifred's face was suddenly white and drawn.

"Why, he's not thinking of going away, is he?"

For answer Robin hopped on to the bannister rail, and treated her to one of his Blondin turns.

"You're as bad as Ishmael," she said. "Don't do that, you little fool."

"Right-oh," said Robin as he jumped down to the concrete.

Winifred was covered with confusion.

"I beg your pardon," she said.

"Beg yours," said Robin. "I didn't mean to frighten you."

"I know you didn't," said Winifred. "You're not that sort. Some boys like to frighten people."

She regarded Robin for a moment with a searching, wistful glance.

"I wish you'd tell me," she began, half to herself.

"Tell you what?"

Winifred pulled herself together. The little shrug she gave was very characteristic.

"Tell me the time," she said.

Just then the Cathedral chime came gustily to them.

"There you are," said Robin with a laugh. "Ten o'clock. My watch is bust. Poor you having to work on Saturday morning."

"Lucky me," said Winifred.

"Good morning," said Robin, and sped down the stairs two at a time.

He knew that the question in Winifred's eyes did not concern the time, but had to do with the Knight of Lushdale. Robin always

wanted to run away when he saw that expression in people's faces. There are things that seem too beautiful to be born.

Winifred knocked at her employer's door.

"Come in."

A shaft of sunlight had pierced the prevailing grey outside. Mr. Knight stood directly in its rays with his hand upon his chin. He had stepped back for a better scrutiny of one of the new pictures. Winifred smiled. Only the other day she had listened to her landlady's strictures upon Reynolds' much exploited little heads and wings. In matters of art Miss Lorraine was a realist. Winifred herself loved the picture, despite its appearance on the backs of hair-brushes and on lids of powder-boxes. Mr. Knight was standing before a large photogravure of the picture. Robin, of course, could not take credit for the shaft of sunlight, but for the rest it was a perfect piece of grouping for which he was indirectly responsible. Winifred felt her heart stir within her with a sudden sense of comeliness and joy.

"One moment," said Mr. Knight, turning to her and beckoning. "Come here a moment, Miss Coot."

She went and stood by his side. Had Mrs. St. Clair been present she would have noticed that expression of half reluctant reverence.

"The little one at the foot of the picture," said the lay clerk. "The eyes. Do they remind you of any one?"

"Robin," Winifred murmured.

Mr. Knight laughed boyishly.

"I'm so glad you noticed it," he said. "Very wide awake, aren't they?"

Winifred forced a smile. Her own eyes were heavy.

"That is a present from Mrs. St. Clair," went on the lay clerk. "The other I bought in conspiracy with Robin. Do you recognize it?"

Winifred did. It was a reproduction from John Blundell's *Russet Book* of the Resting Angel awakening from sleep.

She turned to the piano with a little sigh.

Mr. Knight looked at her with quick diffident concern.

"Miss Coot, you are tired," he said.

She turned sharply as if he had struck her.

"Me tired? What makes you say that?"

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Knight. "It was impertinent of me, but I like to think that you are happy in this work."

"Happy?" echoed Winifred with a sudden little runnell of laughter that would have been hard to interpret.

"My guest has found some work to do," said Mr. Knight.

Winifred started.

"Another job?" she said.

"It is his first job here in Lushdale," said Mr. Knight.

Winifred made as if to speak, then closed her lips.

"I hope he is happy here."

"I hope so," said Winifred, and began to play a well-known setting of "Blow, blow, thou winter wind." She played softly as if prompted by some sub-conscious thought.

"Thou art not so unkind as man's ingratitude."

Mr. Knight hummed the words.

Winifred suddenly stopped.

"I—I think you ought to know about Ishmael," she said.

The lay clerk laughed.

"That's exactly what Ishmael himself said," he replied.

"I think you ought to know about Ishmael and me." Winifred's voice was on a dangerously high note.

"About Ishmael and you?"

But at this moment entered Mr. Young, a budding tenor who came from Stipton on Saturdays for his lessons. Winifred at once

became the swarthy little automaton that Mr. Knight's pupils always expected to find at the piano. She did her work that morning efficiently. Mr. Knight's third pupil left a little before noon. Winifred rose, and as she did so the lay clerk emptied a bowl of beaten copper that stood on his mantelpiece. Robin had filled it with autumn foliage and berries from the Deanery garden.

"Will you take these for your room," said the lay clerk. "Have you ever seen such colour?"

Winifred went as red as the berries themselves. She made as if to take them, then let her hands fall by her side with a sudden gesture.

"I can't," she said. "It's like taking them out of church."

The lay clerk stood irresolute for a moment. Then he turned and replaced the bouquet with a little sigh.

"Ah, Robin lad," he whispered. "It's not so easy to make people happy."

When he turned again Winifred was crouching at his feet. With a little cry of distress he raised her to her feet.

"Child, you must not do that," he said quickly.

Winifred's hands went down to her side. She stood before him with clenched fists. One

would almost have thought she was rating him as she spoke.

"I don't know who you are," she began rapidly, "but I know it's been like Heaven here in this room. Why can't it always be like that? Why can't they leave me alone?"

"They?" Mr. Knight murmured. "Ah, yes."

Then he laid his hand lightly on Winifred's shoulder.

"Child, what is it frightens you out there?" he asked with a glance towards the greyness beyond that cheerful room.

"Everything frightens me," the girl replied. "Aren't you ever frightened, frightened of yourself, frightened of everything."

Mr. Knight considered.

"I think I was once. That was a long time ago."

Winifred's eyes grew suddenly fierce with inquiry.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

Mr. Knight stood at attention.

"I am the Knight of Lushdale," he replied, and his voice rang round the room like a note that is struck. Miss Tomlinson heard it on her way upstairs to the haven of Adrian Walker's surgery. It made her forget her emergency dressing for the moment. Who

was making Gerontius talk like that? She succumbed to an old-time lust for espionage for its own sake, and went to the door with the modest brass plate. Within Winifred was looking at her employer, and it would almost seem that her tribe and race looked through her. The Knight of Lushdale looked and beheld a great hunger of the spirit, and a dread of all that holds us from peace.

"I will not let you go until you bless me," cried Winifred as she flung herself upon him.

Miss Tomlinson turned the handle.

"Oh, I *beg* your pardon. I've come to the wrong door. Could you tell me which is Mr. Adrian Walker's?"

Mr. Knight told her, with Winifred still in his arms. He could feel the girl stiffen like a rod. She looked at Miss Tomlinson bleakly. She was bloodless after that outburst.

"Oh, yes. Thank you so much."

Miss Tomlinson disappeared with a flick of an orange scarf.

Winifred went to the piano and began to gather the sheet music.

"I wonder why I did that," she said. Her voice was dull and mechanical. "I suppose I was mad. I really thought you were the Knight. It's no use trying to beg your pardon. I'd just better go."

Mr. Knight took the leaves and berries from their place again.

"You will come on Monday. In the meantime, will you take these?"

"But—but don't you understand about things?" Winifred began. "Do you know what I've done?"

Mr. Knight smiled.

"You asked me for a blessing," he said. "It delights me to be asked for things, and seldom have I had a demand so emphatic. I have not authority to bless except in the way of one man's goodwill towards another. Be assured I give you that, gladly, Winifred Coot."

The girl remained with one brown hand on the piano and the other to her lips.

"If thinking you're the Knight of Lushdale makes you what you are——" she began. Then she let her hands fall with that sudden graceful gesture that had delighted Ishmael.

"It's better for me to go," she said quickly. "You have blessed me. Go in peace, isn't that what they say?"

Mr. Knight's laugh dispelled any vestige of solemnity from the little scene.

"But I do not say 'Go in peace,'" he said. "I say 'Stay in peace.' A little boy taught me to say that, a little boy with eyes like that."

He pointed to the lower figure in the Reynolds picture.

Winifred almost stamped her foot.

"How can I stay?" she said. "Didn't you see that woman's face? Don't you understand? She will tell all her friends that you're just like the other men."

"That is what I hope she will say," replied Mr. Knight with a whimsical smile. "I could not wish for anything better than to be named in the same breath with the men of Lushdale."

"Do you know the kind of man she will say you are?" Winifred replied. "She will say that you're the kind of man who philanders with the kind of girl who will stand it."

Winifred's voice was harsh and metallic. It seemed that she was bent on awakening him from his dream of Lushdale.

"Miss Tomlinson would not say that of me," said the lay clerk. "Miss Tomlinson is my friend."

His tone of perplexity drew a short and bitter little laugh from the girl.

"Is every one your friend?" she demanded in desperation.

"Every one in Lushdale," replied the lay clerk, and he began to sing softly that song of praise that Robin had first heard.

"I don't understand," said Winifred wearily as she turned to the piano.

"Take my gift," said the lay clerk. "Would it matter greatly if Miss Tomlinson were to say such things of us. They are not true."

"They are not true of you," said Winifred. "You're like a child. I believe you really do love people."

Then she grew suddenly fierce.

"These people that you love. They are going to hurt you, to break you. That is always the way. Well, I'm not going to help them. It's better for me to go. I'll stay till you can get some one else to play for you, but it's better for me to go."

"I cannot keep you against your will," said the lay clerk.

Winifred hesitated.

"If I were to kneel down, would you bless me here and now?"

Mr. Knight's face grew stern.

"Child, I have not authority. It is not thus that I bless."

"I'm sorry," said Winifred. "I'll come on Monday."

The rebuke seemed to have steadied her. As she went down the stairs towards King Street with the berries in her hand she wore her wonted expression of somewhat cynical composure. Miss Tomlinson followed her. She had been reading *The Heavenly Twins* at Canon Bidwell's suggestion.

"Ah," she said to herself. "Angelica! In the next act we may have her in boating flannels." That evening she went to a bridge party, where every one was informed that the new lay clerk was given to amorous passages with his accompanist. Lushdale awaited development.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### ISHMAEL

ROBIN paddled up to the stone bridge in the *Arethusa*. Lately he had been enlarging his knowledge of Robert Louis Stevenson, and had been on an *Inland Voyage* on his own account. He had made the journey from The Trout and Pike in good time, and was very happy because he had found another way of coming upon Lushdale. To rediscover his town from every possible angle was one of Robin's cranks. The winter afternoon had been unwontedly mild but rain threatened. The Cathedral tower looked like a steel engraving against the grey sky. Robin disembarked hard by the promenade of the great white swans, and shouldered his shalop. He had Miss Powell's leave to stow it away in a shed at the bottom of her riverside garden. He started out for home, but was caught by the view from the bridge, and paused with his elbows on the stone-work, and his face in his hands. "Of course I was right," he thought to himself. "He could never know how beautiful Lushdale really is till he tarried."

Robin was very happy that afternoon. He

glowed from his recent exercise, and in his heart there glowed something that had nothing to do with physical well-being, his fierce belief in the goodness of things. Then he was aware of quick footsteps behind him. Some one paused by his side, and spat into the Mallow. Robin looked up. A pair of green eyes laughed down at him from under a towzled crop of black hair.

"Good afternoon," said Ishmael. "Pretty, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Robin.

"Sort of peaceful, eh?"

"Yes, it's jolly."

"Bah," said Ishmael, and spat again. "D'you know why I done that?"

Robin looked steadily into the green eyes. He did rather want to know.

"I tell you why," said Ishmael. "You seem a nice kid. This place gives me the hump. What right has it to be so beautiful?"

"It is beautiful," Robin agreed.

"No, it ain't," said Ishmael without much regard to consistency. "It's laughin' at you all the time."

Robin turned on the stranger. He too found something winning in that loose smile and those merry bitter green eyes. Ishmael had grown into a tall gaunt youth. He was shabbily dressed in blue serge, and wore no

hat. Yet with all his shabbiness and his plebeian speech, he impressed Robin. He appeared to be a man of ideas, despite his vehement and unpicturesque manner of expressing them.

"Yes, laughin' at you. What do I do? Laugh back. What's the good of hollerin'?"

Ishmael brushed his eyes quickly with the back of his hand.

"What's up?" asked Robin lamely. He felt his inability to cope with Ishmael's malady of the soul. He also felt aggrieved that the Knight's town should present such a front to any one.

"Never you mind, kid," said Ishmael.

"You've come a long way, haven't you?" asked Robin with a glance at the burst and dusty boots.

"From London."

"From London. How did you come?"

"Shanks," said Ishmael laconically. "And if you want to know why I come the answer is 'Search me.' I suppose I couldn't help it."

Robin grew suddenly eager to vindicate his town.

"I'm sure you'll like it," he said.

The green eyes grew suddenly wistful.

"Yes, I like it," he said. "I'd like to stay here."

"Oh, I'm sure you'll get a job," said Robin.

"Perhaps my father could help you. He's the Dean, you know."

"Oh, is he?" said Ishmael. "That's lucky. I've got a letter of introducton from the Archbishop of Canterbury. Good afternoon."

Something prompted Robin to hold Ishmael by the sleeve.

"Don't go," he gasped, half wondering what he was going to say next.

Ishmael laughed.

"You're a cure," he said. "I've got to go. Everything's got to go, ain't it. Look there."

He pointed to a stick that had momentarily lodged itself among some cress by the river's brink. It seemed to cling there in desperation, and then yield to the seaward pull of the Mallow.

"That's me," said Ishmael. "Driftin'."

Robin felt suddenly chilled. The tone of fatalism in the vagabond's voice seemed, for a moment, a stronger thing, and, in some strange way, a more dignified thing, than the tones with which he himself had reassured the Knight of Lushdale.

"I wish I could help you," he said. "I like it here too. I always wanted to live here, and now here I am. I wish you could feel like that."

"It must be a very nice feelin'," said Ishmael with a grin. "It won't last."

"Yes, it will," said Robin. "How dare you say that?"

"I hope it will," said Ishmael gently. "You're a funny little piece of goods, you are. Wasn't you afraid I was goin' to cadge?"

"No," said Robin with his deliberate little manner. "I don't think I was."

"Well, I'm not goin' to cadge, not from you anyhow."

Robin was wondering in his own mind what it was that had made him so anxious to retain the confidence of those hungry, defiantly laughing eyes. He was visited by a sudden inspiration.

"I say," he said. "There's a friend of mine. He'd help you, I'm sure."

"He's not a reverend, is he?" Ishmael's eyes were clouded. He had encountered chaplains of various ranks and ages.

"No," said Robin.

"What is he, then?"

"He's a singing master," said Robin.

Ishmael laughed. The laugh ended in a cough which seemed to rack his whole frame.

"Will he train me for Covent Garden?" he inquired, grinning despite his broken speech.

"Come with me," said Robin, and Ishmael allowed himself to be led to Smithson's Buildings. They met Mr. Knight, who had followed a departing pupil downstairs. Mr. Knight sometimes had so much to say to his pupils at going that he often overflowed into King Street in this manner.

"Why, Robin lad," he cried at the sight of the small dark head.

"Sire," said Robin, "here's somebody——"

But here Ishmael introduced himself by falling in a dead faint at the lay clerk's feet.

Mr. Knight lifted him in his arms, and carried him upstairs to his studio. Winifred awaited him with a telephone message.

"Miss Turner has rung——" she began as the door opened. Then she saw Mr. Knight's burden.

"Mr. Walker will have restoratives," he said as he carried Ishmael to a couch. Winifred slipped from the room like a wraith. She met Robin, looking a little shaken.

"I've done it now," said Robin.

Winifred did not answer. When she returned Mr. Knight had the young man's throat and chest bare.

"Poor lad," he was saying. "It was time that he tarried."

Winifred said nothing as she handed him a glass of brandy. Mr. Knight gave him to

drink, and Ishmael opened his eyes. He was very white, but his eyes twinkled at the sight of Winifred. Then they clouded again as Mr. Knight spoke.

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"What's the use?" he replied in a hoarse whisper. "I know your sort. Here, you."

He beckoned Winifred towards him with a little jerk of the head. She came to his side, wondering.

"Don't let him start on the Soapy Sam stunt," he said. "I didn't want to come. The kid made me."

His condition plainly belied his words. Ishmael looked as if he would have willingly gone to any place where there was a chance of lying down.

"I don't know why I come here," he began to whimper. "I didn't come to be reformed anyhow."

Then he was overtaken with another fit of violent coughing.

Winifred took his hand till the paroxysm was over.

"I don't know whether—you're real," he whispered, "but I knew you at once."

Winifred's face suddenly lit.

"Ishmael," she said. She had been searching the young man's face in a puzzled fashion.

Mr. Knight walked to the window. Over the way Miss Tomlinson appeared to be studying the classic lines of a porcelain bath in Thomson's window. Jacky tugged at his leash by her side, and the people passed to and fro in front of that monument of Erastian orthodoxy. It was difficult to believe that these were the self-same folk who had cheered the Knight of Lushdale on his way at the time of the pageant. It would not be true to say that Mr. Knight's spirits sank as the umbrellas went up to meet a long-expected downpour. Mr. Knight would have sung in praise of the umbrellas of Lushdale. Still, it was difficult to see what his town had to offer the young man on the couch.

"I don't know why I come," Ishmael repeated. "Lovall's crowd have got me set. Everybody's got me set here, but I couldn't stay away. Wasn't I a —— fool to come."

Winifred continued to hold the quivering hand. She spoke no word. She too was wondering why Ishmael had come. He had broken in on her happiness like a visitant from the Willows, and yet there was something in her that thrilled at his return. Mr. Knight came back from the window.

"I think I know why you came," he said gently, laying his hand on the young man's forehead.

A look of cunning transformed Ishmael's face.

"What do you know about me?" he demanded. "What did that kid bring me here for? Let me go. I tell you I'm all right. Let me go, I say."

He tried to rise, but Mr. Knight restrained him.

"Lad, I know nothing against you," he said. "Will you not let me help you?"

"You can't help me," said Ishmael sulkily. "Your sort can't help me."

He began to cough again.

"Don't let him talk good to me," he said, lifting an appealing glance to Winifred.

"Why should I trouble you with pious talk?" said the lay clerk. "Can you not believe this of a man, that he would help a sojourner for the sake of the town he loves. I was a wanderer once. I know the bitterness of it. You have been in Lushdale before. That is all I know of you. It is enough. I understand why you have come back."

Winifred almost laughed at the expressions in Ishmael's face.

"Oh, do you?" he said. "Well, you must be a clever cuss."

Mr. Knight turned to the door.

"Robin lad. Wilt do me a service?"

"Sire!"

"Haste to Mistress Carstairs. Tell her I am bringing a guest home to dinner. We will have a bottle of wine."

"You must rest," said Mr. Knight, turning to the couch.

Ishmael laughed a cracked laugh.

"Me rest! Garn. I'll get back to London. I'll get my fare all right. It isn't as if I couldn't get my fare."

"Gently, lad," said the lay clerk.

"If any one says I can't get my fare he's a——"

"Yes, yes. Time to think of that presently," said Mr. Knight. "I live a little way from here. Come back and be my guest. You will not be disturbed. Later on you may talk with me, but for the present you must rest."

"What's your game?" said Ishmael.

"Sleep," said Mr. Knight. "When you have slept it will be time to ask questions."

"Sleep," said the young man. "Hear him. Sleep! Me!"

He was overtaken by another fit of coughing. Mr. Knight knelt and put his arms about him. The young man burst into tears.

"Miss Coot," said the lay clerk, "I shall have to ask you to stay and put off my pupils."

Winifred went to write a note. As she wrote she heard Mr. Knight descend the stairs with the stranger.

"He'll make him sleep," she said to herself. "He made him cry. I couldn't do that."

That evening Mr. Knight sat with his guest at Mrs. Carstairs' rickety octagonal table.

"Your health," he said as he raised one of his landlady's red claret glasses. "I drink to the health of——" He paused and smiled.

His guest looked at him with eyes refreshed from sleep, but still half furtive.

"You may as well know," he replied. "It's Ishmael. Pretty name to give a bloke. I've dropped it, but I think you ought to know. There's one or two other things that I think you ought to know."

"I've seen so many things in people's faces that somebody else ought to know," said Mr. Knight. "I think that is what made it hardest not to tarry."

"Beg pardon ?" said Ishmael.

"I was thinking aloud," replied Mr. Knight. "I beg *your* pardon."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### MISS TOMLINSON AT HOME

"SOME day," said Miss Prendergarst, "Mrs. St. Clair will find more on her hands than she bargained for. This amateur philanthropy generally ends in disaster."

"But, my dear Miss Prendergarst," said Miss Tomlinson, "you don't understand the artistic temperament. Mr. Knight's kisses aren't like solid British kisses. They don't bind him down to anything."

"You know Winifred's history," said Miss Prendergarst shortly.

"I should think that Winifred's history was punctuated with kisses. It amuses me to see how determined Lushdale is to be shocked over something so natural."

"Natural. Yes," said Miss Prendergarst. "Doesn't one speak of the village idiot as natural. If the man hasn't the breeding to know what kind of a person Winifred Coot is, he shouldn't be left alone with her."

Miss Prendergarst's vehemence startled Miss Tomlinson out of her flippancy. It startled her to find that any one could be so passion-

ately loyal to the conventions in these days. She cast a sidelong glance at her companion. For the first time it dawned upon her that Miss Prendergarst was not altogether a figure of fun. Miss Tomlinson was always a little upset when she came upon primitive things.

"The man is here on probation," went on Miss Prendergarst. "Whatever it is he's done, he has his chance to make good. I'd be sorry to see him fling it away. I believe he's a nice young fellow."

Miss Tomlinson opened her lips to speak, but closed them on second thoughts.

Miss Prendergarst was really too literal for her. Mr. Knight was getting beyond a joke. Miss Tomlinson looked about the Close as they walked. The dead leaves lay motionless about Bishop Poundall's statue. A storm had blown itself out the day before. She was overcome with a sudden desire for a fireside and the harbourage of walls, book-lined and picture-hung. There seemed to her mind that there were forces abroad in the Close that morning, "presences plain in the place." Miss Prendergarst loomed large, as people will do sometimes, like a symbolic figure. Miss Prendergarst's love of the Cathedral town was something large. Hitherto Miss Tomlinson had only thought of her passion for the conventions which had always seemed to her so petty.

Lushdale seemed, somehow, like a mediæval city that morning, a city with a wall about it. She fancied Miss Prendergarst offering its hospitality on the old uncompromising terms, and assisting at the expulsion of any who should be unhappy enough to violate those terms. Miss Tomlinson almost threw herself into the arms of Canon Bidwell as they rounded the corner, and left the Close behind them. A joke from the Canon at that moment would afford her immense relief. She wanted to feel herself in the twentieth century again. The Canon, however, did not joke. He looked preoccupied, and a little shaken.

"Ah, good morning, Miss Prendergarst. Good morning, Miss Tomlinson. Would you call that pearl grey—there, above the tower? Very still, is it not?"

"Aren't you out of your orbit this morning, Canon Bidwell?" said Miss Tomlinson. "I know a little girl who adores Wednesday mornings because that's when the Canon comes to school."

"I've been doing locum for Trenchard," he replied.

"How very depressing," said Miss Tomlinson.

"I'm afraid it's not quite in my line," said the Canon. "I've had rather a shock. I am sorry to say that our Mr. Knight is in trouble.

It's a thousand pities. Such a silly business too."

Miss Prendergarst's face looked like the knocker on a neighbouring door.

"Winifred Coot," she said.

"Oh, no, no, no," said the Canon. "It's a very small matter, but under the circumstances it is deplorable. It appears he has befriended a young fellow who, perhaps you may remember, is a very unsatisfactory young fellow. Knight has had the lad living with him. Somebody should have prevented it."

"Exactly," said Miss Prendergarst.

"It is rather a delicate business to tell a man that one doesn't admire his choice of friends. Then the Dean has been very pig-headed about it."

"It serves the Dean right," said Miss Prendergarst. "What have they done?"

"Mr. Knight has knocked a man down. That is all. The man was not hurt, but he is a vindictive beast. . . . Mr. Knight seems to have been getting his young friend home. A trivial affair, but it will look so bad."

"He will have to resign," said Miss Prendergarst.

"Oh, come," said the Canon. "Let us hope it will not be as bad as that. The affair would be negligible if it were not for the unfortunate circumstances."

"Well, it is for the Dean to act," said Miss Prendergarst.

"I wish I had seen him knocking the man down," said Miss Tomlinson. She had recovered her spirits. It somehow seemed to her that Mr. Knight had cleared the atmosphere by this little outburst. The Canon and Miss Prendergarst, however, did not seem to think so. They knew the history of every man and boy in the choir. It was quite certain that if Mr. Spragg, Christian Knight's *vis-a-vis*, had knocked a man down in the street they would have cheerfully combined to pay his fine. But Mr. Knight had isolated himself by his reticence. If he wished that exclusiveness to continue he must keep out of the police court news. . . . But a deeper matter for Miss Prendergarst's disapproval was his choice of Ishmael as a companion.

Miss Tomlinson had some friends to tea that afternoon. Mr. Knight's little peccadillo provided her with some gossip with which to regale her guests. . . . Life became quite tolerable again to Miss Tomlinson.

"What will the Dean do about it?" somebody asked.

"The Dean will tell him not to do it again," said Miss Tomlinson. "The Dean doesn't want to quarrel with Dr. Broom."

"Yes," said the editress of the *Mallows*

*Free Lance,* " a baritone's a baritone, drunk or dry. Dr. Broom would find it hard to put on those new anthems if they sacked his Mr. Knight."

" New anthems," said somebody. " They're very old. One of them is as old as John Fleming."

Here Mrs. Strangeways entered, and Mr. Knight dropped out of the conversation. There was something in the expression of the Dean's lady that made one gather she was aware of a change in the talk. Mrs. Strangeways was always being pulled up by the dignity of her position. It was ridiculous for a Dean's wife to be so young. She smiled upon the company.

" I'm so sorry I'm late," she said sweetly. " I had to go with Robin to see Mr. Knight. They've given him seven days. He won't pay a fine. Rather splendid, don't you think ? "

## CHAPTER XXV

### LUSHDALE GATHERS ITS SKIRTS

MRS. CARSTAIRS stood in tears on the Dean's hearthrug.

"Couldn't you make him see sense?" she said. "I don't want to turn him out, but I've never taken a lodger who has been in prison. I curse the day he ever set eyes on that young blackguard."

"He has made up his mind," said the Dean. "I am very sorry. You know what happened, Mrs. Carstairs. He went in search of the young fellow, fearing he was in trouble."

"I know," said Mrs. Carstairs, "and people are saying now that he was tipsy himself. Can't you make him see sense, and pay the fine? It sort of frightens me for some one to come into my rooms straight out of prison. I can't afford that sort of thing. And now there's old Mr. Bates after the rooms, and I don't know what to do about it. Mr. Bates is a nice quiet gentleman. I was very fond of Mr. Knight, and how was I to know who his friend was?"

The Dean smiled.

"I think you had perhaps better offer Mr. Bates the rooms. Mr. Knight will understand. We must fix him up somehow when—when he needs accommodation."

Mrs. Carstairs hesitated.

"You'll pardon my mentioning it, I hope, Mr. Dean," she said, "but people talk, and I can't help hearing them."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Carstairs," said the Dean. "People talk. You can tell them that Mr. Knight was not drunk, that he struck in defence of his friend, that he is an honourable man, and that I mean to stand by him even if it involves my resignation."

Mrs. Carstairs gasped.

"Who is this man?" she said. "I wish you'd tell me."

The Dean planted his feet a little further apart on his carpet, and threw his head back.

"Your guest is—the Knight of Lushdale."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Carstairs soothingly. "Exactly. Yes, yes. I think I will write to Mr. Bates. Good morning, sir," and she sidled out of the door.

The Dean remained standing with his head buried on his chest.

He was aroused from his reverie by the entrance of Robin. To say that Robin was looking worried would be to understate the case.

"Well, Robin," said the Dean.

"I wish I'd never asked him to stay," said his son in a voice that was little above a whisper.

"I anticipated difficulties," replied the Dean, "but I would not say that, my son. No. Decidedly I should not say that."

"I don't see how it will end," said Robin.

"Perhaps the Knight sees," said the Dean.

Then he clapped his hands together briskly.

"In the meantime, boy, remember—he's your guest—and therefore mine. It's odd to think that once I joked about the Knight. 'I wonder how Miss Prendergarst would react if the Knight were to take lodgings in Lushdale.' I remember saying that. Well, now we know, don't we, Robin? I think Miss Prendergarst has been the better for his stay. I think we all have."

"Oh, how can you say that, daddy?" said Robin. "I heard some people talking just now. It frightened me."

"Well, perhaps I'm a little frightened myself, Robin," said the Dean. "However, that's just the time to dig in your heels, isn't it? I stand by the Knight."

Robin looked up into his father's face.

"You've never said you're angry with me," he said.

The Dean's lip quivered.

"I'm not angry with you, Robin," he said. "There. Run along. I've got to get a sermon ready."

When Mr. Knight reappeared in the Close he noticed a change in the faces of those who passed him. In many cases there was an element of amusement in the glance she received. Miss Prendergarst's acknowledgement of his salutation, however, was a very perfunctory affair. She dragged Jacky away with some difficulty, for the little dog's greeting with his old benefactor was rapturous. A little further on the lay clerk came upon Mr. Little. Mr. Little's manner rather suggested a family bereavement. His greeting, if anything, was rather too soulful. There was a tremendous hand-grip, and very straight play with Mr. Little's fine eyes.

Mr. Knight laughed.

"Lushdale has at last proved worthy of her poem," he said. "The Knight has been compelled to tarry. Eh?"

"I think you take it splendidly," said the schoolmaster. "Would you like me to thrash that swine?"

"My dear sir," said the lay clerk, "I'm not quite sure to whom you refer, but for Heaven's sake don't thrash anybody on my account."

The smile of Miss Tomlinson, whom he next encountered, was a study.

"She thinks me a swashbuckler," the lay clerk said to himself. "I am a figure of romance. James Little looks upon me as a weaker brother. The lady with the little dog. What does she think? Ah, there's Robin. Robin knows."

"Sire!" whispered Robin as he slipped his small hand into the lay clerk's. "What have I done? It was my fault. I persuaded you. It was here that you met me with the mare, and now the mare is sold."

"And I am a prisoner on your side of the sunlight. Is that what you're thinking, Robin lad?"

"I didn't think things out," said Robin. "You looked so tired, and Lushdale looked so beautiful and quiet."

"It is very beautiful," said Mr. Knight. "Look yonder, where the Poundall Road turns. It has been very pleasant to pause outside my lodgings, and watch the lozenge of star-lit sky above me. It is little more than that. They built closely in Fleming's day."

Robin tried to drag out the news that Mr. Knight's lodgings were no longer to be in the Poundall Road.

"Sire!" he began, "Mrs. Carstairs has funny ideas."

The lay clerk seemed to divine the cause of his distress.

"There are places as good as the Poundall Road, I dare say, Robin lad. I would not embarrass Mistress Carstairs. Perhaps I tried her over much in the matter of Ishmael, though the poor boy behaved right well until that night. Were you going to tell me, Robin, that Mistress Carstairs was for sending me away?"

Robin nodded.

"We'll find somewhere else," he said as cheerfully as he could.

"Aye, we'll find somewhere else," said Mr. Knight. This was the first time he had looked in the least downcast since the ridiculous little incident. It was clear that he had not expected Mrs. Carstairs to take fright at so slight a brush with the law.

Robin could have cried out to see him thus humiliated.

"Daddy said you were to come home with us, sire."

"Nay, nay," said Mr. Knight gently. "That was kindly said of him, but it were wiser not. I shall find lodgings, Robin. Never fear."

Mr. Knight was quite right. He had become something of a storm-centre in Lushdale. People took sides on the subject of his late escapade. It would never do for the Dean thus to provoke the lay clerk's enemies.

Mr. Knight had little difficulty in finding

rooms. He moved his belongings to King Street with Robin's help. The boy tried to recapture that first thrill when he had seen his friend " settled in " at Mrs. Carstairs'. He did not succeed. Something was gone—the old delight, the wonder of it. Mr. Knight's effects had suffered dishonour. They had been rejected from a Lushdale house. Mrs. Carstairs' nervous scruples had been another of the little things that were to restart the stayed wheel.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE RETURN OF ISHMAEL

WINIFRED went on her way through the late summer afternoon. Lushdale looked very beautiful at that hour with so many folk set free to taste of that first breath of spring. Winifred had stayed with Mr. Knight through the winter. He had made her see that the best way to encourage ill-natured gossip would be to leave him precipitately. So, to use her own term, Winifred had brazened it out. The time had passed very happily, for with the disappearance of Ishmael after the affair which had led to Mr. Knight's arrest there had gone that old unhappy antagonism to the quiet of the Close. She had avoided The Trout and Pike with all its unhappy associations, and had spent much of her time in concentrated study. That was the way to find peace. On that afternoon she had the sense of having attained to a level where it was possible to regard life dispassionately.

Lushdale blessed Winifred as she crossed the Close. Her youth cried out in answer to the grave loveliness of the chimes. As she went

on that afternoon she encountered a regiment of little girls crossing the Close two and two, the most select of Lushdale boarding schools on its way home to tea. What security seemed to be theirs. It was something to which they were born. Winifred thought of her own hard-won peace, and half envied them. Then she reflected that this sense of security was only an illusion. Nothing was secure. She found herself wondering compassionately what stress of loss and bereavement awaited each one of those beautifully dressed and nurtured children. In that mood there was strength. She thought of the detachment of the Knight of Lushdale, a security won by an old-time renunciation. For a moment she almost seemed to be standing in his place. Mr. Knight passed her, and lifted his hat with a smile. She wondered how it was possible for this man to live on the strength of that all-sustaining idea. If it made him what he was, why shouldn't he believe he was the Knight of Lushdale. Perhaps he was. Winifred was surprised to find that she did not recall that outburst of hers with any embarrassment. . . . The chimes lifted up their voice, and time was not as she lived within that circle of mellow sound. Then they ceased, and she felt the cobbles of Mitre Lane beneath her feet. She turned the corner and came upon Ishmael,

Ishmael with the eyes of a hunted animal, and his black mop of hair in a thicker tangle than ever. Ishmael looked comic, like some species of attenuated clown, a pierrot without his white suit and pom-poms, an offence to the chaste gravity of that evening.

Nevertheless Winifred felt her heart leap with something that was not altogether fear and resentment.

"You!" she said.

"Yes, that's me. Back again. Couldn't help it."

"Oh, why can't you leave me alone? Haven't you done enough to hurt him? Why did you come back?"

"Couldn't help it," said Ishmael.

"Does he know?"

"Mr. Knight? No. Nobody knows but you. I've been dodging Blackett. There's young Lovall too. He don't know yet."

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

Ishmael looked at her like a contemplative spaniel, his head on one side. He seemed to be thinking it out. She could not but laugh.

"No," said Ishmael, "I'm not ashamed of myself. I want you too bad to think about that."

It was the best frontal attack he could have

devised. Ishmael always looked at his best when he was being perfectly sincere.

"I like men to have a little pride," said Winifred. She was overcome by that irrational instinct to hurt, and Ishmael stood there, waiting for her to satisfy that instinct upon him. He took it with that wavering smile upon his large mouth.

"And yet you like me," he said.

"You!" said Winifred.

"Yes, you do. You liked me when first we met, and you liked me those evenings down by the Willows."

"Until you spoilt it."

"Well, there was something to spoil then. You didn't tell him."

"I tried to. He's like a great child. I thought you'd gone away for good. I was happy."

"No, you wasn't."

"Yes, I was. You! Why, you can't even talk properly."

"I can play, though, can't I? I'd soon learn to talk proper. Come down to the Willows again, Winifred."

"I tell you I hate you. You frighten me."

Ishmael laughed bitterly.

"That's a funny idea, me frightening anybody."

"What are you going to do? You can't stay here. Nobody will have you after what happened. You had your chance, and you flung it away."

"Well, there wasn't much harm in a bloke going out and getting a drink, was there? If I hadn't met Lovall and his gang."

"If, if, if. You're all 'ifs' and excuses. You can't go back to him. You couldn't have the face to."

"Well, where can I go?"

"Do you mean to say you came back here without a single plan in your head?"

"I thought if I saw him again."

"Well, you can't see him. You must go back to London. Go anywhere."

"I can't go to-night."

His appeal to her was two-fold, the appeal of the weaker to the stronger, that dumb look that awakened all the mothering instincts in her, and the appeal of life, the rhythm and the mystery and the terror of it. It thrilled her strangely, this dependence of him upon her. She thought rapidly.

"They'd give you a bed at the young men's hostel. I can lend you some money. Wait here and I'll bring it to you."

"And to-morrow?" Ishmael shot out the question with the desperation of the closely pressed.

"Oh, perhaps we'll all be dead to-morrow. Stay here."

She slipped away, and presently reappeared with the wherewithal for Ishmael's lodging.

"I'll go and see him to-morrow. Why shouldn't I? He said he wanted me to stay."

"Do you think he can work miracles?" snapped Winifred.

Ishmael smiled, and ran his hand through his tangled mane.

"I shouldn't be surprised," he said.

"Well, good night. I wish you'd never come."

"No, you don't. Good night, little mother."

So Ishmael lay that night as a citizen, not as an outcast. The impartial chimes mingled with his sleep as he turned upon his bed. In his new quarters hard by the unresting Mallow Christian Knight slept a dreamless sleep, the rest that comes of a healthy weariness. Winifred did not sleep. She lay and listened for the recurrent chime, and when it came it seemed to her like a human voice, questioning her.

"What is it frightened you out there?" Mr. Knight had asked of her, and that was the question of the chime.

"Everything frightens me," Winifred whispered in answer, and as she spoke she heard the cry of a night jar. So she had often heard

it when she lay, a frightened child, at The Trout and Pike, listening for her father's muttered imprecations in his sleep, listening for that insistent other voice that repeated and repeated the call of the Willows.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE CALL OF THE WILLOWS

ROBIN had come to Mr. Knight's lodgings with a window-box full of primroses transplanted from a copse close to the railway bridge by Mallow Ford. It was thus that he strove to reassure himself. He had been right when he called upon the Knight to tarry. Surely he had been right. It was difficult to believe himself wrong upon such an evening. The lay clerk's new rooms, though less spacious than those he had occupied in the Poundall Road, allowed one a fine view of the Cathedral city. Robin could look across the Mallow to the tower, backed by the dark line of Lushmount. . . . He felt that stir of excitement that the lengthening days always bring to the young.

"Soon it will be time for cricket, sire," he said. "I was right, wasn't I, sire? This is the way to bless Lushdale, to look down from a window that is part of it all."

The boy and the man stood together in silence, each busy with his thoughts. Their eyes were enlightened by what they saw below

and about them, their ears were blessed by the voices of the resting town.

Then Winifred burst into the room. The pallor beneath her dark skin seemed to have robbed her of her comeliness. She looked a scared, half-demented thing.

"Ishmael!" she almost jabbered. "I knew it would happen."

Mr. Knight turned upon her.

"Child," he said, "what has happened?"

She flung herself into his arms, and told her story. When she burst into crying he did his best to comfort and reassure her.

She had gone with Ishmael by water to The Trout and Pike. He had begged insistently that she should come, and she at last had yielded, though she felt instinctively that she was drifting into misfortune. Drifting. That is what she had always dreaded. She was not strong enough to save Ishmael. Ishmael was foredoomed. And now it had come. They had encountered young Lovall. He had insulted them, called her vile names, and thrown Ishmael's disgrace into his face. Ishmael had lost his temper. Stones had been thrown, and now Lovall was lying there. He had fallen backwards, fallen all crooked, and had lain there so still, so still. You should have seen the funny way he had fallen, all crooked. And Ishmael had run away. She had seen his face.

He looked just like the little boy she had first seen. She would never forget his eyes. He had run away, and soon they would catch him. That was the way of things. If she had listened to her better reason it would never have happened. She had yielded to Ishmael's entreaties, and so they had gone. So it had happened. She had helped to bring about the curse that was upon Ishmael. She was a thing accursed herself. Mr. Knight listened to her rapid speech.

"Courage, child," he said. "This man may only be stunned. I will go at once."

She clung to him.

"Don't let them take him," she cried. "They mustn't take him. I couldn't bear it. His eyes. They laugh at you, but he's not wicked. Don't let them take him."

Despite the desperation of the moment the lay clerk seemed to find something in Winifred's face that made him smile strangely. He saw there another of those things that were to drive him from Lushdale. You could not call it a little thing, this love of Winifred Coot for Ishmael the vagabond. It may be doubted whether the girl was aware of the great thing herself.

"Courage, Bambino," said Mr. Knight as he gently disengaged himself. "I will go at once. The man is stunned, that is all."

In a very little time he was speeding on his bicycle towards the spot that Winifred had indicated. Winifred sank on the floor, moaning. She was like an embodied protest against the peace of that evening.

"Laughing at you, that's what it's doing."

So Ishmael had spoken of Robin's beloved town. Robin knelt by the girl's side.

"You heard what he said," he spake with his hand upon her shoulder.

"Yes, I heard what he said. But how can it be well? They will take him. Things just happen. There's no meaning in it, no sense in it. Oh, if I'd only stayed in the Close this evening. Tell them I did it. It was my fault. It wouldn't have happened if I hadn't gone with him."

"It will be all right if he says so."

Something in Robin's tone arrested Winifred in her outburst. She rose to her feet. Robin looked very small and inadequate in the face of this tragedy.

"I'll go back to my lodgings," she said quietly. "They may want me presently. Tell them where I've gone to."

"Would—would you like me to go with you?" Robin stammered.

Winifred almost smiled.

"No. You'd better stay here. You belong here. I don't understand, but I'm glad I

came here first. It doesn't seem to mock me now."

In the meantime Mr. Knight was wondering why, in Heaven's name, Winifred had wasted a precious hour in coming to him instead of seeking help at the nearest cottage. He dreaded what he would find as he approached The Trout and Pike. By this time it was dark, but his heart leapt with relief when he heard a man's voice muttering from the ditch. Lovall, it appeared, was by no means dead. He found a swarthy, picturesquely clad figure by the light of his bicycle lamp. He was bleeding from a cut on the forehead, but his manner of falling had evidently conveyed falsely that sickening sense of finality which had struck Ishmael cold, and sent him on his unreasoning flight.

Mr. Knight had the fellow out of the ditch after rendering what aid he could. He managed to get him as far as the nearest cottage by dint of persuasion and the help of his own strength. A stream of light showed them as the door opened to his knock. He recognised for the first time the man he had knocked down in King Street. He turned from this bracing discovery.

"Hello, hello, hello," squeaked the asthmatic old fiend. "You've got it back on him this time."

"The man is hurt," said the lay clerk. "You will let him lie down. I will go for a doctor."

Jim Blackett cackled.

"Oh, yes. He's hurt all right. I don't want no murdered men in my house, thank you," and he banged the door in the lay clerk's face.

A sudden wind blew up from the Mallow. The young night seemed alive with little voices. Jim Blackett's cackling laugh seemed to be echoed from all sides. Mr. Knight stood with the injured man in his embrace. The situation had become comic. Lovall chattered inconsequently. All about the Knight of Lushdale were little antagonistic voices, the talk of the green earth which Winifred had heard as she lay and listened to the call of the Willows.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### ERRANTRY

MR. KNIGHT eventually found help from the driver of a passing motor-car, and arrived with his man at the Lushdale hospital. The young house surgeon grinned at the reappearance of these two protagonists in a recent *cause célèbre* at the Lushdale police court. Lovall, however, by this time, was in no state to give an account of his injuries. Mr. Knight stated that he had been summoned to the man's help. Lovall had been involved in a quarrel. That was all that the lay clerk would state.

"You don't mind my saying so," said the house surgeon, "but you're behaving like a fool. It will be quite simple to find out who your messenger was."

"I went to one in distress," said the lay clerk. "What does it matter so long as his wounds are healed?"

"My friend," said the house surgeon, "you'd better go home, and stay there till you're wanted. If you'll take my advice you won't stray very far. I've no time to argue with you now."

"As you will," said the lay clerk with a bow.

Outside a great arc light shed its uncompromising rays upon the passengers, and there it was that Christian Knight came upon Winifred, and incidentally upon that which was to precipitate a decision. He was aware of the girl's beauty, not for the first time, but from a new point of view. He realized, as the little Madonna-like face looked up at him, that Winifred Coot meant more to him than any other of those beloved folk of Lushdale. He came upon the discovery quite suddenly in that white light, and it was like a blow in the face. As he looked down at her, questioning him with those guarded eyes of hers, he was aware of the return of something exorcised far back in the remotest days his memory could recount. He was aware of resentment against Ishmael, Ishmael who could call that look from Winifred's face, and all apparently in vain. Ishmael would go stumbling through his life to some foolish and unlovely end, and Winifred's love would be thrown away. Thrown away! A great weariness seemed suddenly to overtake him. Had Robin thought of this when he had urged him to tarry? There was no rest that way. Only stagnation and bitterness. He realized that he was begrudging that vagabond boy the one thing that could save him. It seemed that he had suddenly

lost his sense of perspective. The people in the street seemed to be walking down on him like trees. He felt no longer compassion for them, but a great terror, a sickening urge to assert himself. He struggled in his mind for some word of prayer.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Then suddenly he seemed to right himself. He was aware of Winifred with Robin by her side, and they were in just proportion.

"All is well, Bambino," he said with his old merry laugh. "Lovall will not die."

"They will take him, though?"

"You must go and find him. Bring him back. Help him to face it out. Child, you could do anything with that boy. Halloa, Robin lad. It looks as if they may be locking me up again."

"Sire, he will come back when he knows, and Lovall will tell."

"Lovall seemed very happy," said the lay clerk with a smile. "He thinks he has bought the finest horse in Mallowshire. Lovall is, perhaps, happier than any of us."

## CHAPTER XXIX

### GO IN PEACE

WHEN Lovall had ceased to chatter incoherently of horses and ladies, and was considered in a fit state to give an account of his misfortune, he betrayed a similar reticence to that manifested by the lay clerk. Whose business was it that he came to be lying in the ditch ? . . . All the while they waited upon his word there waited one in hiding. Driven from place to place by the old terror of man for his fellow-men, Ishmael expiated for that moment of red rage. Then came a morning when he came upon a copy of the *Mallowshire Guardian,* dropped carelessly by the master of a wherry in the street of Stipton, and was suddenly free of the sickening menace that had followed him wherever he went. William Lovall, recently discharged from the Lushdale hospital, had drawn a prize in a continental lottery. The sun no longer mocked Ishmael. He could bear to listen to the birds again. With that relief came an overpowering sense of loneliness. He was filled with an overmastering desire for word with Winifred,

Winifred who had shared with him that awful moment of desolation, so far as it is possible for one human being to share with another.

He had been befriended by an eccentric old man who kept a poultry farm near the seaside town. The old man, discerning possibly the boy's desperation, had made good use of him, and Ishmael had almost come to the point of confession, so unbearable had the suspense become. He had been able to obtain only an occasional glance at a newspaper until that blessed morning when he came upon *The Mallowshire Guardian.* Instantly the nature of his vagabondage had changed. He was a free man, though he had but three pennies to call his own. These he squandered on a letter to Winifred. It came to her, like everything that spelt Ishmael, breaking in upon her peace, yet stirring something in her that was elemental. She climbed the stairs of Smithson's Buildings that morning with the old unrest in her eyes. Mr. Knight received her with an attempt at his old manner, but Winifred was aware of his preoccupation with something that did not concern her. The old reassurance of the room was there, but she felt instinctively that whereas he had imparted that sense easily and lightly in the old days, now it involved some great effort on his part.

She gave him her news. She did not feel that this time he relieved her of her doubts and perplexities in the matter of Ishmael.

Miss Turton, who came in for her lesson, was aware of something amiss. The old sense of effortlessness had disappeared. For the first time in her experience she was glad to come to the end of a lesson.

Winifred produced the letter after she had gone. She watched her employer's face as he read. For a moment it seemed as if he struggled with some thought that he would dispel. She hardly recognized him for that brief space. Then once more he was the genius of that room, poised and reassuring, infinitely kind.

"Winifred Coot," he said as he handed her back the letter with a smile, "I was once asked, 'What do you know of the world?' Perhaps it is little that I know. What I am going to say to you may sound like sheer foolishness to those who set a value on all that the Close stands for. I think you have it in you to make something better of this boy. I do not promise you happiness or security, but I think you will find more than many do who would shun such an outcast. The thing that you have feared is not an evil thing, but something unknown."

"It is so quiet here," said Winifred.

Mr. Knight smiled.

"Quietude can only bless us when it comes from something that is strenuous. You will understand that when I am gone."

"When you are gone?"

Mr. Knight did not answer her. Instead he turned to the mantelpiece and took from it a photograph of Robin, Robin in the habit of one of the merrie scholars. The little face looked up at him with that almost harassed smile, the anxious impressario.

"Ah, mannikin," he said. "This is not going to be easy for you. It is not pleasant to find that one has been wrong."

"Why—why must you go away?" Winifred cried passionately.

"Child, it is the way of things. I have told you who I am. What you have gained here you will not lose."

"They are driving you away, these people that you say are your friends. I knew it would be so."

"No one is driving me away," said the lay clerk. "It is something that folk cannot help, something in which I must have no part if I would bless this town. I have read of it in one of dear old Goodeve's books as 'the life force.' It is a splendid thing, and yet men turn from it in weariness, and then it is that I bless them."

Winifred sat down by the piano as if she would think things out.

" Mrs. St. Clair made me think it was wicked to speak with Ishmael. Mrs. St. Clair is kind and good. How can you explain that ? "

" Ishmael is poor and illiterate," said the lay clerk. " Mrs. St. Clair sets great store on seemliness. She would protect you from the rough usage of the world. Ishmael belongs to a world that is rough, but I know that he has felt the call of this place."

" Aren't you angry with him ? I am often. I hate ungainliness. He's been nothing but trouble to you and to me."

" And yet we both love him. Strange."

Winifred laughed shortly.

" Oh, but you love everybody."

The lay clerk seemed to wrestle with himself for a moment.

" It is very pleasant to be able to say that again," he said.

Winifred looked at him wonderingly. Then she dropped her eyes.

" Bless me before you go," she said.

Mr. Knight took her hand in his as a friend would do.

" I bless you, Winifred Coot," he said. " Go in peace."

## CHAPTER XXX

### MR. KNIGHT TAKES A WALK

BERTIE BIDWELL handed his cup for the second time.

"I think it is time some one told the Dean about his protégé," he said. "It's not doing him any good."

He was sitting in that nook in the Mallow tea-rooms where Winifred had sat with her father.

"He's been knocking down some more men, hasn't he?" replied Miss Tomlinson, his *vis-a-vis*.

"No. It was the same man I believe. But that is only by the way. Surely we have a right to know something about this fellow." Then he stopped, open-mouthed, for the subject of his complaint stood before him.

"I beg your pardon," said the lay clerk with a smile. "I could not help hearing what you said. I wish to reassure you. The Dean will no longer be embarrassed by my presence here as a chorister. I am resigning my appointment."

To her surprise Miss Tomlinson found herself blurting out a crude and bald question.

"What? Are you going away?"

The lay clerk smiled.

"That would not be a perfectly accurate statement," he replied. "Nevertheless, may we shake hands?"

"By all means," said Bertie Bidwell somewhat limply.

Miss Tomlinson's response to the invitation was also a somewhat limp affair. Mr. Knight walked out of the Mallow tea-rooms, having broken bread for the last time in Lushdale. He made in the direction of Mrs. St. Clair's house. That was a spot where he had most often been inclined to believe that Robin was right. On his way he encountered Miss Prendergarst at the corner. He lifted his hat. That lady had suddenly become interested in Borrow's shop window. Only Jacky returned his salute, barking joyfully and tugging at his chain. Miss Prendergarst's evasion was not the pharasaical act that it appeared to be. It simply meant that she felt her inability to fit Mr. Knight into her scheme of Lushdale.

"It is not thus that I bless," said the lay clerk to himself.

Mrs. St. Clair's welcome was exactly as it had always been. Mr. Knight felt the tug of Robin's Lushdale as he sat down in his accustomed place. He summoned determination to break the spell of that room, a spell that was

not æsthetic—there were many drawing-rooms in the Cathedral town that were furnished in better taste. It seemed that Mrs. St. Clair was doing for herself what Robin had tried to do for his friends. She was weighting down her spirit from too arrogant flight by a multiplicity of chattels.

"I have had a visitor earlier this afternoon," said the lady. "Winifred Coot."

"She has told you?"

"Yes. I don't think I understand."

Mr. Knight laughed.

"It is not easy to understand unless——"

"Unless?"

Mrs. St. Clair's puzzled blue eyes searched his face.

"It is better that I go," said the lay clerk with that odd foreign shrug of his.

"I do not understand," Mrs. St. Clair repeated. "I was so happy to think that the child would have congenial work."

"I think she was happy," said Mr. Knight.

"I wonder if I was right. Perhaps I should have told you—have warned you."

"What was there to warn me against?"

Mrs. St. Clair looked her distress.

"You see," she said, "you came among us as a stranger. You would be surprised, I think, if I were to tell you what your coming has meant to me."

"You are my very dear friend," said the lay clerk. "You were one of the first of the many friends I have made here."

"Your friends," said Mrs. St. Clair. In retrospect she saw the Knight of Lushdale on his way through the streets on that first festal day of the pageant. All Lushdale had been his friend that afternoon. She tried to dispel from her mind an insistent analogy. Mr. Knight smiled.

"I think you are an old enough friend for me to make a guess at your thoughts. I take leave to differ from you. I shall lose none of my friends in Lushdale."

Mrs. St. Clair was suddenly bereft of that air of complacency that had so often annoyed Miss Prendergarst.

"Why must you go?" she demanded with a little break in her voice.

The lay clerk rose and paced the room.

"How little a place Lushdale seemed," he said, "as I looked down from the hills. It was like a gem."

"When—when did you look down upon Lushdale?"

"Many times I have looked down, madam. You have never asked me what it was I broke with when I came to live at Lushdale. Have you never questioned what is called 'the past' of your friend?"

Mrs. St. Clair's hand went to her head.

"You were Robin's friend. He brought you here. Who am I to question?"

"Madam," said the lay clerk as he took her hand and lightly kissed it. "I shall not bid you good-bye. We may meet some gusty morning when the sound of the chime is blown down the Poundall Road or when you look up from your book and the sun is all about you."

Then without another word he stepped into the entrance hall and let himself out by the front door. On his way he encountered Robin riding precariously on the back of a schoolfellow's bicycle. Half a dozen Lushdalians clattered noisily back from the very last football match of the season.

The lay clerk was stricken with a sudden realization of what his decision meant. He looked very sadly at Robin as he hopped from his perch and ran up to him.

"Oh, sire, isn't it topping? Cricket starts to-morrow."

"Good luck to thee, Robin."

"There you go again."

"What would thou of me?"

"There you go with your 'thees' and 'thous.' Will you never get into the way of us chaps?"

"Why, Robin. It will not matter."

The boy grew suddenly white.

"Will not matter? What do you mean?"

"I take my way by Mallow Ford," said the lay clerk heavily.

Robin clung desperately to his arm.

"No, no, no. I was right, I was right. It's coming out right, sire."

"Yes, Robin, it's coming out right. Thou wilt know that in time."

He ran his hand through the boy's hair, and then walked quickly away.

Robin heard his mates calling on him. He responded mechanically, but he went like one who has been struck.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### EVENSONG

MR. KNIGHT stood by the door of the Dean's study.

"I think you are acting wisely," said Dr. Strangeways. "I can only say that I am very sorry. I have kept my word to Robin."

"I was a stranger, and you took me in," said the lay clerk.

"I am not such a logician as my son," said the Dean with a wry smile. "I fear I was one who called on the Knight to tarry, without waiting to consider what I had to offer him."

"There is so much you have given me," said the lay clerk. "Have I not been in and out of your house a score of times? I have known great happiness here."

"You have honoured us," said the Dean simply. "My home shall be the dearer to me because you have gone in and out amongst us. I am afraid the people of Lushdale have disappointed you. Hard things have been said of Cathedral towns and their peoples. It was inevitable that we should have disap-

pointed you. The weight of public opinion, Knight, is a dead weight. If I were not to receive your resignation I should have to resign myself. Public opinion can sometimes be a wicked and insensate thing."

"Say not so," said the lay clerk. "People's faces are set against me, but it is only for a time."

"What do you suppose the people would do if I were to declare to them that the past from which you wished to break goes back to the days of John Fleming? If I could make them believe that, how ridiculous would this little scandal with which your name has been coupled appear.

"It is better that I should go," said the lay clerk. "It is time that a sweet breath blew through Lushdale."

There was no shade of bitterness in his tone. He spoke as a man who desires something for one whom he loves.

"So short a time it has been," said Dr. Strangeways.

"So happy a time," said the lay clerk. "I have done so many things I longed to do: what you would call 'the little things.' To me they have been great things."

"Tremendous trifles," said Dr. Strangeways.

The Cathedral chimes began to sound for evensong.

"I must go," said the Dean.

"And I," said the lay clerk. "I'll take my way at evensong."

"Your resignation has not yet taken effect," said the Dean. "Come with me."

So the Dean and Mr. Knight walked together across the Close for the last time. They had often walked thus before, for Robin would ask his mother's leave to bring the lay clerk back to tea; and he would stay until the chimes summoned him away.

Later, Robin came to the lay clerk's lodgings.

Mr. Knight was putting things into his portmanteau in a feckless, haphazard way.

"Sire," said Robin, "when I begged you to stay, and when at last I persuaded you, did I destroy something?"

"Destroy something, Robin. Why, no. What was there for you to destroy?"

"If you go away like that, no one will ever hear you laugh, as they used to. No one will ever think of you when the sun shines on the Mallow, and the birds sing at dusk."

"Why not, Robin?"

"You are not the Knight of Lushdale," said the boy. "You are Mr. Knight. I made you so. Granny Maloney has bought your mare, and you cannot go by Mallow Ford."

"Why, Robin, I can walk to Mallow Ford. There will be a way of crossing, never fear."

"But I do fear," said Robin. "Sire, put everything back where it was. Please, sire. That's the last thing I'll ask you to do. And, sire, sleep to-night. Sleep at home here in Lushdale, and let the chimes come through your sleep to you."

"As you wish, Robin lad. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Robin." Good-bye."

He held out his hand, and Mr. Knight took it in his.

"Thou hast asked nothing of me, lad," he said. "In truth thou art greater than the poet whose eyes thou hast. Good-night."

## CHAPTER XXXII

### GRANNY MALONEY HOLDS TO A BARGAIN

THERE was a knock at the studded oaken door. Granny Maloney started up, and dropped her knitting. She went into the passage and drew back the bolt. A gust of wind blew the rain in from the darkness. For a moment Granny Maloney could see no one. Then she stumbled upon a huddled form on the doorstep. She bent and lifted Robin Strangeways to his feet.

"What have you come for on such a night?' she asked. Her speech was low and gentle.

"Granny Maloney, Granny Maloney," sobbed Robin, as he clung to the brown silk gown. Granny Maloney without her bonnet and her green cloak did not seem like a witch at all. She led him into the parlour, lit with a hanging lamp and a small fire of coals. The cockatoo surveyed him triumphantly from the mantelpiece.

"I told you so, I told you so!" he screamed.

"Heed him not," said Granny Maloney.

"He is right," said Robin. "He should not have tarried."

"Aye. Better not, better not," said Granny Maloney dispassionately.

"Better not, better not," screamed the cockatoo.

"Tarry, Knight. Tarry, Knight," murmured the old lady. "So I importuned, and so he came, but all the while I knew it were better not."

"I did not know," said Robin. "I was a child, and I suppose I thought that people live happily for ever after at the end of a story."

"The end of a story," laughed Granny Maloney. "When did your story end?"

"When he sold you the mare," said Robin.

"Ha, ha!" said Granny Maloney. "The mare is mine. That story's over."

"Granny Maloney, Granny Maloney," Robin wheedled. "Let's have another story. I've come all the way in the dark to beg you for that. You won't refuse a kid like me."

"I'm a hard old body," said Granny Maloney. "Ask Nat there: he knows me."

Robin looked round to see the dumb factotum grinning at him through the open doorway.

"Give me back the mare," Robin pleaded.

Granny Maloney threw back her hands.

"What next?" she almost screamed.

"What next? What next?" shrilled the cockatoo.

"Why should I give you the mare back for you to go riding off with him?"

"It isn't for me," said Robin.

"Do you think he will take me off with him then?"

"Why not?" said Robin.

Granny Maloney grew suddenly voluble.

"See here," she said. "I found for him when he lodged with me. That was my hour. You took him from me. You would always take him from me because you are young and I am old. He is pitiful with the old, but with the young he is wistful. Now your hour has passed."

"Passed!" said Robin. "I wish I had never asked him to tarry."

"It is not so easy for him to go now, hey? Granny Maloney has bought the mare."

"Be pitiful," Robin began.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### VALE!

ROBIN awakened from a light and fitful sleep. Some one was singing in Mitre Lane. He heard the chimes tell out five o'clock. His room was still in darkness. He had slept despite himself, for underlying his rest was that foreboding sense of change and loss. He crept out of bed and slipped on his dressing-gown. Mr. Knight had given him that dressing-gown last Christmas.

"It is red as the breast of a robin," he had said to Mrs. Strangeways, and Robin had put it on and capered all over the croquet-lawn.

"He's like the Lord High Chancellor in *Iolanthe*," his mother had said.

Robin tried not to think of these things as he wrapped himself up against the chill of the dawn. Outside his room a little flight of stairs led past a great cistern to the slates. Robin climbed up the well-known way.

A breeze fanned his face, and all the trees in the Dean's garden began to stir. The dawn lay like a grey feather over Lushmount. Robin stood in his red cloak with his hand upon the brickwork of a cowled chimney. He made a

little study in black and red for any to see from the street. But nobody saw.

Robin stood tired-eyed at the funeral of his childhood. "When I became a man I put away childish things." He did not know why those words should keep running through his head, an echo of his father's voice from the Cathedral pulpit.

"What a jolly room it was," thought Robin. "I wonder what they will do with all his things."

The thought brought rebellious tears to his eyes, but he brushed them away.

"I've got to keep my part of the bargain," he said to himself. "He wouldn't like it if I grizzled over that. Perhaps I will hear him laugh sometimes."

The breeze suddenly freshened, and there came snatches of that so well-remembered song.

Robin stretched out his hands.

"Bless me. Oh, bless me in passing; oh, Knight of Lushdale."

The wind lifted his hair from his forehead. His heart suddenly seemed to laugh. Robin knew that he had been blessed. He stood where he was, and watched the new day come. A bird twittered sleepily from an elm below him. Another answered from a cedar of Lebanon under whose branches Mr. Knight

and the Dean had once read Browning's *Pauline* by turn, and Robin had listened, only half understanding. He remembered, however, the lines about music.

> "For music (which is earnest of a heaven,
> Seeing we know emotions strange by it,
> Not else to be revealed) is like a voice,
> A low voice calling fancy, as a friend,
> To the green woods in the gay summer time."

There was not a spot in all that garden, awakening now to life, that had not some association with that august visitor, now on his way towards that labour he had set down for a little while. A cock crew. Robin heard the first door opening. He turned and descended the steps to his room. In another minute he was asleep. When Lushdale woke that day she was greeted to two thunderbolts. Mr. Knight had disappeared. His room was left in perfect order. A few unpaid bills were found upon his desk with the money necessary for their payment neatly placed in envelopes.

Otherwise there was no sign that the lay clerk had contemplated a journey. At Flint House some one else had been setting things in order. Little Nat had knocked in vain at the door of his mistress's room. Becoming frightened, he had forced an entry. The great four-poster was covered with an immaculate

coverlet. . . . Wardrobes and cupboards were opened to the air, filled with carefully pressed and folded garments. The cockatoo lay dead in its great wire cage. Granny Maloney was gone.

They found her later that day on the hither side of Mallow Ford. She was walking the road with an easy stride. One arm was outstretched, and she prattled happily of the mare's paces. A cottager, who knew the old woman, persuaded her to turn aside and rest under her roof, while she sent her little boy to telephone the police. It was clear that Granny Maloney would come to harm if she continued thus. The old lady consented to stay after a little argument. The cottager brought her a chair to the door, for the morning was warm for spring. She went to prepare her a cup of tea. When she returned Granny Maloney was sitting very still. She looked straight along the road, and smiled happily. She made no answer to the woman's repeated question. . . . She did not breathe. She only smiled. The woman in her terror had time to wonder why some people had called Granny Maloney a witch.

But no one persuaded that other wayfarer to tarry. Mr. Knight disappeared as completely and inoffensively as a cloud in the sky or the rime on a hedge. The only thing that

was unpicturesque about his going was the hue and cry that it raised. Lushdale turned to the Dean for an explanation. The Dean's reply was exactly that which he had vouchsafed his son on their speedy way back to the Cathedral.

The Dean simply said, "I don't know." . . . There were some who wished to have the Dean removed. Others, again, betrayed an anxiety to have him analysed—psychically, of course.

The Dean, however, did not resign. To quote Miss Prendergarst (a habit to which I may have been too prone in the course of this account), the Dean "lived it down." . . .

Robin began to grow. In the course of time he went to Harrow, where he made few friends and no enemies. At the time of writing I suppose he is a lanky youth, plodding his way up towards the Sixth Form. Here is an extract from a letter written by his mother to Granny Strangeways.

"Robin is a funny boy. At his age he ought to be making plans for the capture of London, but his one idea seems to be to get something to do that will keep him in Lushdale. 'I want to have my brass plate on a house near the Close, mummy,' he says, though he is still rather vague as to what is to be written on the said brass plate. I am hoping that he will turn his thoughts to doctoring,

but I don't know whether he has the right kind of brain for that. Anyhow, there you are. Robin brought us to Lushdale, and he doesn't mean to leave his beloved town. I think my Dean is fond of the place too. If only Mr. Knight had not gone away. But I must not open up that topic. I know your views on the matter."

Some day Winifred Coot may find her way back to her beloved town, but at present she is in exile for the sake of Ishmael. . . . Some day she may be dissuaded from the belief that she, more than any, helped to drive Mr. Knight away from Lushdale. Mrs. St. Clair came to her help again after Mr. Knight's departure. But something seemed broken in Winifred. She had not the heart to quarrel with the new employer that Mrs. St. Clair found for her. Then there came another letter from Ishmael. She felt the pull of that old half-motherly affection. It was not the call of the Willows she heard, but something deeper. She disappeared from Lushdale, " and came, as most men say, to little good." Yet I think the Knight of Lushdale smiled on her as she went. Winifred and Ishmael were married at the end of a tour they made with a musical comedy. That is as far as I can follow them.

Mr. Plumtree still conducts parties of visitors through the Cathedral. He still pauses in

front of the Knight's window and recites his rigmarole. "Some have declared," he will enunciate, "that the ring of the 'orse's 'oofs was clearly haudible." But Mr. Plumtree will sometimes be caught up in the course of his recitation by an obstinate questioning, and his little party of disciples will wonder what ails him.

What is it that causes this break in his discourse? I think it is a sudden recollection induced by that almost quizzical painted smile, the recollection of a slim and graceful figure in white flannels who stands and smiles as the wicket-keeper solemnly walks to the further crease. Mr. Plumtree swallows a little lump in his throat and now continues, "We will pass on to the heffigy of Robert of Lushdale, who fell at the battle of Tewkesbury and lies buried in this hedifice," and you follow him along with your cousins from across the Atlantic, and your sisters and brothers from the uttermost ends of our far-flung Empire.

Mr. Goodeve and Mrs. St. Clair often meet and exchange greetings. Sometimes they will engage in literary disputations which generally end in laughter. Was it possible they were both deceived upon a certain gusty morning when the solicitor's lady handed on a joke that had come with one of Robin's letters from Harrow.

"Ha, ha," laughed Mr. Goodeve.

"Ha, ha," laughed Mrs. St. Clair.

"Ha, ha."

Perhaps it was merely something to do with the acoustics of the Close, but the two looked at each other oddly.

"They say," said Mr. Goodeve, "that the secret of Lushdale's salubrity is to be found in these jolly breezes."

"I have no doubt of it," said Mrs. St. Clair, but she thought wistfully of her Thursday afternoons. Mr. Knight had had a way of slipping in just before evensong.

Robin and Mrs. Strangeways never visit the Lady Chapel now. They do not like to think of the Knight's window. Rather they would remember how the iron gate of the Deanery garden would slam to, and that lithe, grey-clad figure come walking towards them past the hollyhocks and the beds of roses and pinks. They like to remember that boyish, diffident smile, and to hear that resonant voice:

"Greetings to the Dean's lady. Greetings, Robin lad."

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